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Haider vs. the Hypocrites

THE EDITORS

Bush vs. Jesus

JAMES WOOD

THE

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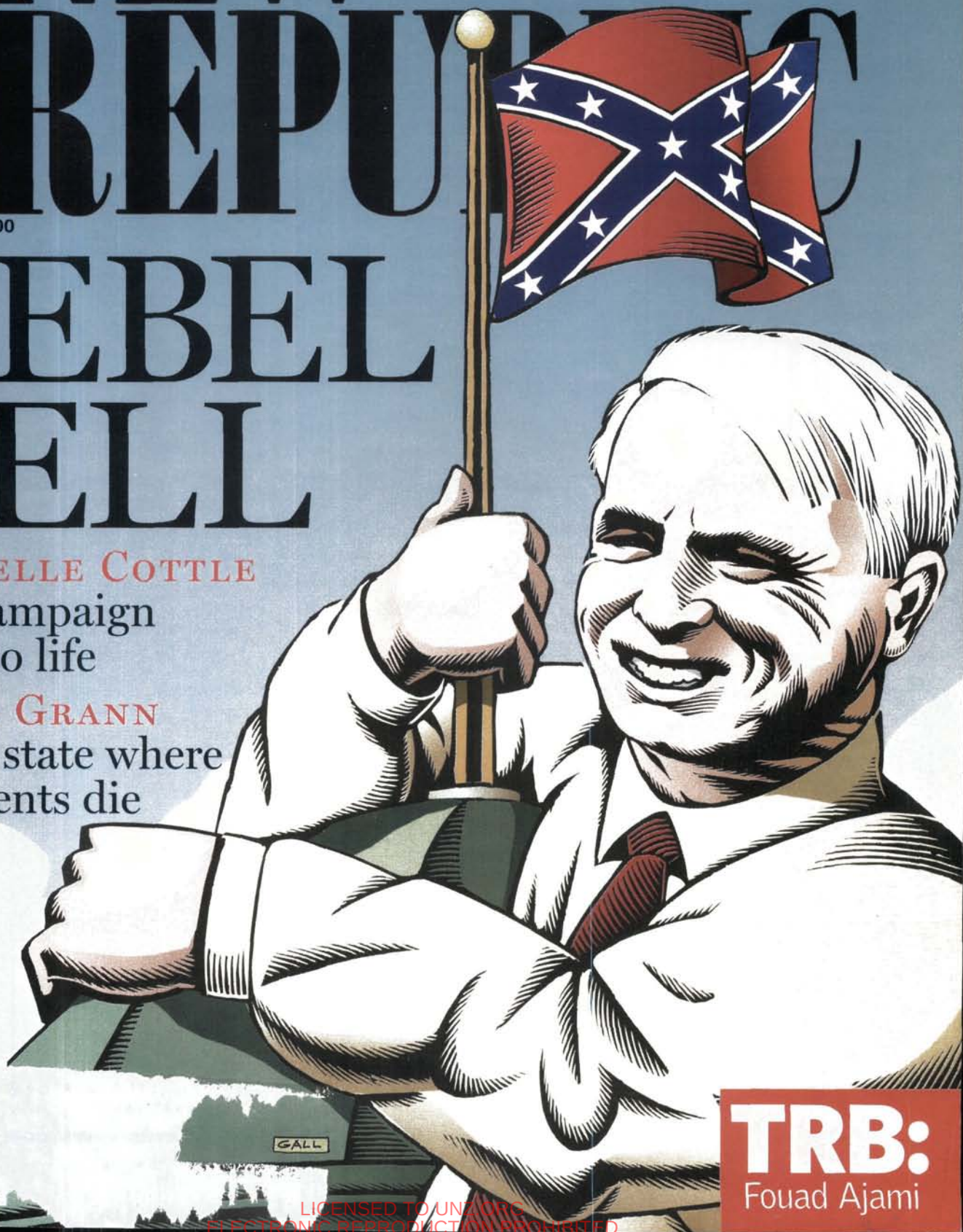
REBEL YELL

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on a campaign
come to life

DAVID GRANN

on the state where
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TRB:

Fouad Ajami



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Where We Stand

A commentary on public education and other critical issues

Let's Stay the Course

By **SANDRA FELDMAN**, President
American Federation of Teachers

It's a shame to see opposition beginning to develop against two of the most important trends in education: higher academic standards and zero-tolerance policies. The higher academic standards that states are putting into place worry parents and others because they fear that too many children will be held back, and large numbers will be unable to graduate. Policies that call for zero tolerance of violence, drugs, and weapons in schools are being ridiculed or even called racist because they have been imperfectly—and in some places stupidly—applied.

But the problem here is not with the principles behind standards and zero tolerance—the overwhelming majority of people, including teachers, principals, and parents, believe we should raise the bar on student achievement and behavior. The difficulty lies in getting the policies done right. We need to recognize problems as they come up and work to solve them instead of giving up on higher standards and zero tolerance at the first sign of difficulty.

Making Standards Work

Nearly every state is raising its standards for what kids should know and be able to do, and we're already seeing positive results. More students are taking challenging academic courses—for example, the percentage of African-American youngsters taking Algebra II rose 20 percentage points between 1982 and 1994. Fewer students are dropping out than in the 1970s and 1980s—the improvement is especially striking for black students—and scores are up on both SAT and ACT exams, as are student test scores in many of our most troubled schools.

But there are problems. In too many places, school officials are relying too heavily on high-stakes tests to determine whether students are meeting standards. Tests are valuable. They provide a common measure of how well students are doing, and high-stakes tests give students a strong incentive to study hard. But it's wrong to have a single test determine whether students graduate. Tests should be one—but not the only—factor in assessing student performance.

If we want to make higher standards work, teachers must understand what they are and how to teach to them. They need professional development coordinated with their state's standards and curriculum guidelines based on the standards. Tests have to reflect the curriculum. And last but far from least, students who are having a hard time meeting the standards must



We need to continue the commitment to high standards and safe schools.

get the help they need—and get it early. When these essential supports are missing, many students will fail to make the grade—and their parents will become angry and disenchanted with standards.

Discipline and Common Sense

Zero-tolerance policies work, too. Where they have been appropriately applied to serious offenses, there have been fewer incidents of violence and disruption. Despite several horrifying incidents in recent years, school crime is at its lowest level in decades, especially in urban schools. As with higher academic standards, however, the policy must be carefully drawn and sensibly implemented.

Discipline codes are supposed to make clear exactly what kinds of behavior go over the line, as well as the consequences that will follow for kids who engage in them. The point of nailing down the consequences is to ensure that the captain of the football team does not get away with a tap on the wrist for the same offense that caused another kid to get suspended from school. Zero tolerance, which usually means expulsion, should be reserved for carrying weapons, drug offenses, and violent acts.

Even the strongest supporters of zero tolerance—and AFT is among them—have to admit that some disciplinary codes are poorly written and poorly administered. It is unfair—and ridiculous—to lump bringing a loaded gun to school with bringing a nail file, but some one-size-fits-all policies seem to do just that. It's also unfair to ignore a student's disciplinary record: A kid who breaks the rules all the time deserves different treatment from one who's made a single, minor misstep. And zero tolerance should never be an excuse for throwing kids out on the streets. Districts need alternative placements for kids who are chronically disruptive, and these must be good learning environments, not miniature prisons.

We know higher academic standards and zero-tolerance policies work when they are done right. If we need to make some mid-course corrections, we should. But the commitment to safe schools and high achievement for our kids must continue. ■

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Sequitur

TO THE EDITORS:

Martha Nussbaum appears to be eager for a fight, for she has gone to some trouble to invent a provocation (Correspondence, February 14). In her letter, Nussbaum argues that I committed "a staggering non sequitur" by inferring from a critique of Peter Singer's philosophical views that "Singer provides a 'cautionary example' showing that philosophy has little to offer to our public life." In fact, what I argued is that the discrepancy between Singer's theory and his conduct "provides a cautionary example about the professional expertise in practical ethics." As does Nussbaum's misrepresentation of my views.

PETER BERKOWITZ
Washington, D.C.

Drifters

TO THE EDITORS:

Robert Wright's accurate observation that "political globalization is catching up to economic globalization" ("Continental Drift," January 17) begs at least two questions. Whither global governance? And what role will the United States play in ensuring a form of global governance that is democratic and just?

Regarding the first question, the progressives among us should heed Wright's advice to resist morphing into ironic Buchananites. But they need not dance with William Safire's "laissez-fairies," either. Rather, advocates of human rights, labor standards, and environmental regulations must perceive in global governance new opportunities to effect progressive change. What an institution like the World Trade Organization needs is a healthy dose of democratization and transparency, not atavistic acquiescence to national sovereignty.

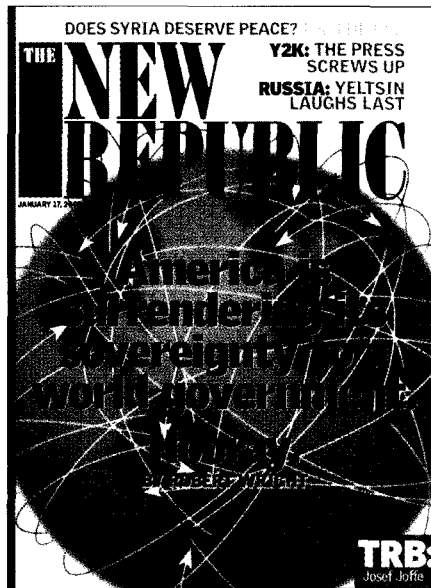
These sentiments might sound more plausible if our elected officials in Capitol Hill set better examples of constructive internationalism. Instead, the Senate recently squashed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and once again treated its U.N. arrears as a political chessboard. Why must this booming boat quell the rising tide of positive global governance?

STEVEN P. MILLER
World Federalist Association of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Industry standard

TO THE EDITORS:

David Kestenbaum provides a factually accurate postmortem of the media's scandalous overhyping of the so-called millen-



nium bug, but his larger conclusion doesn't reach far enough ("System Failure," January 17). The cause of the silly coverage of the story was not the (admittedly great) technical ignorance of the typical general-assignment reporter. Rather, the core source of the failure of the Y2K coverage was that the news media had a vested interest in perpetuating a myth of computer vulnerability that would justify the vast expenditure of media coverage that resulted from the scare.

Of course, as Kestenbaum points out, most reporters are unqualified to write about the increasingly technical subjects they must cover. If reporters do not have the wit or enterprise to seek out contrasting opinions on their own, they quite frequently pass on spin as fact. But they are rarely fired for this, because, as everyone who has ever been in a newsroom knows, it is a truly systemic problem.

MARK G. LEVEY
Alexandria, Virginia

TO THE EDITORS:

Back in 1962, I was one of a number of young computer programmers learning how to use those new devices for business purposes—and, without realizing it, helping to establish a two-digit-year convention that became a potentially disastrous industry standard. We would joke that none of us wanted to be working in data processing in the year 2000. It was funny not because of the built-in problems we were creating with the limitations we had in coding but because none of us could imagine that the programs we were writing would still be running at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As it turned out, it wasn't 40-year-old programs that were dangerous but a 40-year-

old standard that should have been changed years ago.

David Kestenbaum's time would have been better spent examining why a problem this important was ignored for so long by those in the business. The media may have overdone some of the coverage of Y2K, as Kestenbaum contends, but it has yet to address the industry malpractice that led to the problem—or to ask, "What else is this industry doing that may some day shut down the world?"

MEL MAURER
Westlake, Ohio

Get out the vote

TO THE EDITORS:

In "Near Miss," Carol Flake Chapman states: "Unlike the federal electoral college ... Mississippi's is a 'free will' system ... in which representatives are not bound by the votes of their districts" (January 17). Under the Twelfth Amendment, not only are electors free to vote for anyone, but, as Hamilton's Federalist Paper 68 makes clear, this was precisely the intention of the Framers, who did not completely appreciate the virtues of pure democracy. Indeed, electors have exercised such freedom on numerous occasions. For example, Ronald Reagan received the vote of one Washington elector in 1976, when he was neither a nominee nor a candidate.

If no candidate receives a majority of the electoral vote, the House of Representatives must choose the president from among the top three vote recipients, with each state allowed just one vote. Thus, theoretically, a president may be elected even if he is a noncandidate and receives but a single vote in the electoral college; and this choice may be made by the 26 states with the smallest population and, translated in electoral terms under the 1990 census, with 130 of the 538 total electoral votes.

And we've been worrying about Y2K!

IRVING M. HERMAN
Boca Raton, Florida

Honest to God

TO THE EDITORS:

Jean Bethke Elshtain is to be commended for her sensitive discussion of the murder and perhaps martyrdom of 16-year-old Cassie Bernall ("Heartland of Darkness," January 17). Elshtain rightly condemns the dangers of the political exploitation of this girl's death and explores the complexities of the concept of martyrdom itself.

I think that at least one further issue merits discussion, however: How is one to

continued on page 45



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FROM WASHINGTON

E-gads!

THOSE IN THE know tell us that great productivity gains drive the new American prosperity, and that we must take it on faith that they will last. But it would stand to reason that the speculative fever all around us hurts productivity as well. Work must be interrupted to e-trade, to check stock quotes, to see if Lucent shares have rebounded from the savage beating they have taken of late, to tune in to the financial-news networks for the debate between those who claim that fundamentals still matter and those who claim that profit-making is passé. A society thinking obsessively of money, and of the rumors of new money made by the people thinking of money, must suffer productivity losses. Pity Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic: they struck too early, before e-commerce truly took hold, before the stock quotes held everyone in thrall.

From the annals of the new capitalism, I begin with Jeff Bezos, *Time* magazine's "Man of the Year." The honor turned out to be a poisoned chalice. In the days since Bezos's anointment, his company's value has declined by billions, its stock price beaten down from earlier highs of \$113 per share to the mid-\$70s. The word on the street is that The Street has lost some of its patience with Bezos and with the new math of e-commerce. On February 2, Amazon.com reported that sales in the fourth quarter of 1999 were a record \$676 million, handily beating the analysts' expectations. But if sales rose, so did losses. They were a record \$320 million, more than five times the company's losses in the last quarter of 1998. The chief financial officer's spin: "Consistent with our strategy, we went all out to make sure we delivered for our customers this holiday season." In any souk in the world, this logic would land you in the poorhouse. In this new world, such new math makes you the wizard of our time. It's a "state of mind" stock, the promoters of e-commerce said of Amazon.com, as they called upon investors to continue to underwrite this new economic paradigm.

Edward Yardeni of Deutsche Bank Securities, who predicted that Y2K would

disrupt global supply chains and plunge the world into recession, tells another tale. As the year and the century and the millennium passed to fireworks, the world disappointed Yardeni. The trains ran on time in Alma Ata, kabob was grilled the way it had been grilled for centuries in Istanbul, and Christians battled Muslims in Nazareth. So the forecaster then delivered an apology (of sorts) on his website: "I was wrong, but I am happy that Y2K has been a nonevent. Looking back, I don't regret my effort to raise awareness. I believe Y2K was a big problem." We might dub this the "intensity defense." Queried by Jonathan Fuerbringer of *The New York Times* on whether his failed forecast would lose him clients, Yardeni was optimistic: "I think investors I deal with know that I think a lot outside the box and that can lead to some good forecasts. This one was a crummy one." Luckily, he added, "on Wall Street, we rarely look back."

For yet another tutorial on the new economics, this one merging celebrity, the Web, and the speculative fever, we turn to the Internet company Dreamlife. It is the brainchild of Anthony Robbins, a motivational speaker, a TV infomercial star, and the Elmer Gantry of business revival meetings. Last spring Robbins took Dreamlife public, keeping a majority stake worth \$370 million for himself and cutting some celebrity investors into the action. Among those allowed to purchase their shares at a special low price were NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw, tennis player Andre Agassi, and securities lawyer Joseph Flom. All stand poised to reap a windfall. In the crazy world of new valuations, a company that consists, thus far, of a website and that boasts quarterly revenues of \$155,000 (the interest on its bank account) and losses of \$3.2 million has been valued at \$650 million. (By comparison, J.P. Morgan's infamous deal to purchase Andrew Carnegie's steel business for twelve times its annual profits seems quaint.)

And what exactly does Dreamlife do? "We are trying to . . . build a place where people will go and assess their life," explained a spokesman. "Then, after they've assessed their life, define their dreams or their goals; and after they've defined their dreams or their goals, have the opportunity to pursue their dreams or their goals. You'll be able to learn how to write a screenplay, how to find a new job, how to have better communication skills, because it is really the whole person we're interested in." Gantry couldn't have put it better.

The seduction's reach is best captured for me, though, by the following dispatch from Oregon. Halfway, a town of 360 in the eastern mountains of that state, has

just changed its name to Half.com in a publicity deal with a Philadelphia Internet start-up of the same name. Ranching and mining were in a tailspin, so Halfway perked up when the start-up came calling with an offer of \$75,000, computers for the elementary school, and new jobs in an Internet call center once the business catches fire.

I watched the mayor of America's "first dot-com city"—laconic, in his overalls, a man of the ranching world—and a bubbly young wizard from Philadelphia, the head of the company that bills itself as a "one-on-one auction site," do a joint TV interview. The wizard was breezy and confident and full of possibilities; he had gotten the publicity he wanted out of the deal. He had made it onto NBC and landed interviews from Japan and Holland. As for the mayor of the now-digital town, he had about him the worried look of a man who was already being second-guessed by his constituents. For there was grumbling that the town had been sold short and that the Philadelphia wizards had gotten the better part of the deal.

Still, having a stake in Dow Jones is infectious. Who wants to continue selling fish bait and elephant garlic (the traditional pursuits of Halfway residents) in the face of the new possibilities? People are ready for this new game and take to it with ease. Said Marilyn Seal, of the town council: "I feel we have made two halves whole." The Oregonians are to be excused; caution has been cast to the wind as everyone takes to the new speculation. The average holding period for NASDAQ stocks was five months last year, down from the historical norm of two years.

In the papers there are dispatches about people in Ivory Coast, once a place of relative order, fleeing to the forests from the politics of ruin. In Sri Lanka there are dispatches about killings between Tamils and Sinhalese. Countless places unravel, but we have been immunized by the e-Truth: Those places don't matter, their people are superfluous.

This view may grate and offend. But, until the speculative mania subsides, it shall reign. And it shall, in the way of dominant faiths, be carried to distant and remote places. In Bangalore and Colombo, in Sofia and Seoul, there are legions who know of Edward Yardeni and Anthony Robbins and "Tokyo Joe" (a.k.a. Yun Soo Oh Park, the trading guru now charged by the Securities and Exchange Commission with defrauding the subscribers to his Web services by speculating on his stock picks). And those legions are sure that they, too, can do what Edward Yardeni can do.

FOUAD AJAMI

TARGETING CANCER

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- *Undermined Democracy:* You have worked to undermine the votes in seven states and the District of Columbia on medical marijuana. You forgot that democracy comes before drug war.
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**A civil society cannot permit government
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Haider and the Hypocrites

THE INCLUSION OF a slick and sickening fascist in the democratically elected government of Austria has provoked a peculiar season of over-reaction and under-reaction. States and international bodies and individuals whose consciences have

been singularly untroubled by their dealings with all varieties of tyrants and murderers are suddenly drawing the line. They are shocked to discover such a poison in Europe. (And in Austria!) Ambassadors are being recalled, and skiing in the Austrian Alps is being judged for its impact on human rights. And as a consequence of all these posturings, the papers are filled with counsels of calm, with reassuring reminders that Jörg Haider is not Adolf Hitler.

The imperturbability, it must be said, is a little excessive. No, Haider is not Hitler; but then Hitler was extremely distinguished in his field. Surely Hitler is not the standard for perturbation and protest. The Freedom Party is not the Nazi Party. It is bad enough that it is the Freedom Party. The rise of Jörg Haider is not *Anschluss*, but lesser outrages than *Anschluss* must be fiercely opposed. In view of Haider's pronouncements over the years, it is certainly impossible to doubt that he would have been found in the crowds in 1938, ardently welcoming the Nazis to Vienna. One of Haider's formative moments was a youthful pan-Germanist speech called "Are We Austrians German?" He continues to argue that Austrians are ethnically Germans; and the argument from ethnicity is the essence of his politics.

Haider promises to turn back what he calls *Überfremdung*, which is how Goebbels described the presence of foreigners in Germany. STOP THE FOREIGN INFILTRATION, read his campaign posters in 1999, when he won 27 percent of the vote and earned his place in the People's Party government. (The "foreigners" in contemporary Austria comprise less than ten percent of the country's population; but the politics of resentment always has a slim basis in reality.) Haider has expressed his high regard for the Waffen SS as "decent people who have character and who have stuck to their beliefs through the strongest headwinds." He has praised the Third Reich for its "orderly employment policy." He apologizes immediately, of course, for the offense that he gives; and then he proceeds on

his offensive course. His is a winking fascism, which is the only sort of fascism that can prosper after Hitler.

It is true that Haider is not alone in the West in his foulness. He is the kin of Jean-Marie Le Pen in France and Patrick Buchanan in the United States. He, too, hates modernity, though he battens from it. He might even be described as the dark side of globalization, in which the new techniques of communication and the new illusions of familiarity are enlisted in the service of a nasty atavism. It is also true that the economic policies and the political abuses of

the previous Austrian government were disastrous. (*The Wall Street Journal* appears to believe that Haider is more an enemy of dirigisme than an enemy of decency, that he represents only a cynical version of the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute.) But all this cannot in any way extenuate what has come to pass. Haider is a villain, and he deserves to meet the strongest headwinds. What is being tested is nothing less than the political culture of Austria, about which historians have much to teach and refugees have much to remember. And so the protests in Austria are right and encouraging. Even the resignation of the director of the Salzburg Festival (which has a very ugly past to live down) must be applauded.

The same cannot be said about the kicking and screaming of the European Union, which has cut off its ties with Austria and threatened to suspend its membership in the allegedly august body. These actions will not help the opposition to Haider in Austria. Worse, they are rancid with hypocrisy. Never mind that the EU tolerated the fascists in the government of Silvio Berlusconi a few years ago. The high-minded democrats who are now crying Hitler kept their cool when one of Hitler's minions—a real Nazi and a proven war criminal—was president of Austria. They were delighted to do nothing about the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, and they had to be dragged by the United States into the war against ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. They can live with the extermination of Grozny. And they are falling over themselves to do business with the murderous theocrats of Iran and with Saddam Hussein, who uses chemical weapons against his own people. The notion that the foreign policies of these states stand on moral foundations is risible. Indeed, the rise of Jörg Haider is a boon to the amorlists of Europe. They can hide their base purposes behind their constantly refreshed memories of the Holocaust. Auschwitz? Never again. But otherwise the low games may continue. ■

CAN'T BUY ME LOVE: There is a certain ritual when a presidential candidate withdraws from the race. The media duly reports the reasons he failed, then takes polite notice of his contributions: that he brought important issues to the fore, inspired a dedicated coterie of supporters, or otherwise enriched the campaign. But what can one possibly say about Steve Forbes? He did not enhance the tone or substance of the Republican debate. In fact, he degraded it in spectacular fashion. In 1996 he ran as an extreme fiscal conservative, agnostic about social issues and hoping to make a play for supply-siders. In 2000, seeing an opening on the cultural right, he ran as a born-again Christian who cared to the depths of his soul about the unborn, despite having shown no interest in them during his entire adult life. Forbes, who has never held elected office, screamed endless clichés about out-of-touch, inside-the-Beltway, arrogant Washington bureaucrats. Yet he ran a parody of a politics-as-usual campaign. He hit George W. Bush with the lowest of insinuations—first trying to legitimize the Texas governor's alleged cocaine use as an issue, then making oblique references to his drinking. This from an anti-gay-rights crusader with a gay father. When reporters asked him questions, he invariably refused to answer, instead maniacally recycling the kind of poll-tested blather that alienates Americans in droves. In New Hampshire this year, some of his most enthusiastic supporters consisted of schoolchildren lured to rallies by the promise of free food and t-shirts without so much as the pretense of substantive support. Yes, he had ideas. But you don't have to be Noam Chomsky to suspect that when a multimillionaire says the most evil thing in America is the progressive income tax, a smidgen of class self-interest may be at work. And let's not overlook one more obvious, if slightly impolite, problem of the Forbes candidacy: His credentials for office consist entirely of inheriting a lot of money and then not squandering it away. Of course, one could credibly argue he didn't even do that: If spending \$70 million on not one but two vanity campaigns doesn't qualify as squandering a fortune, then nothing does. When Forbes announces his withdrawal—as he was planning to do as TNR went to press—we're sure somebody will thank him for his service and wish him well. Not us. We merely hope this exit from the political stage is his last.

NEW YORK STATE OF MINDLESSNESS: First Alan Keyes attacked John McCain for joking that the industrial rock group Nine Inch Nails was his favorite band. Then Gary Bauer went after Keyes for jumping into a mosh pit while proto-Marxist lyrics by Rage Against the Machine wailed in the background. Now the controversy over politicians and rock music has taken an even stranger twist: New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has attacked Hillary Clinton for embracing the notoriously subversive music of Billy Joel. *Billy Joel*? Yes, it seems that Hicksville's favorite son, hitherto remembered best for his sappy love ballads and tender remembrances of Long Island suburbia, went through a "dark" phase during the early '70s. The evidence? One of the songs from that era, "Captain Jack," is about a drug dealer

(named Captain Jack, naturally) and one of his clients; the song also talks about masturbation. So when Clinton's staffers piped Joel's *Greatest Hits* over the loudspeakers at her official campaign kickoff event and "Captain Jack" came on, Giuliani pounced on the opportunity. He attacked Clinton as an ultraliberal out of touch with mainstream values. "The song encourages young people to use drugs and masturbate," Giuliani complained. The substance of the charge is—shocker!—silly. A close textual reading of "Captain Jack" reveals that the song doesn't glamorize the drug-addict life. Quite the contrary; the song's addict ends up with his life in shambles—"And if you can't understand why your world is so dead . . . well, you're 21 and still your mother makes your bed." As if that weren't enough, in concert Joel ad libs the chorus, warning, "Captain Jack could make you die tonight." (The song's treatment of masturbation is a shade more ambiguous: "Your sister's gone out. She's on a date/ You just sit at home and masturbate.") Still, Giuliani's ploy had its desired effect: it distracted from Clinton's announcement speech and marred her New York press coverage for days. It also produced the equally comical spectacle of Clinton's campaign defensively distancing itself from the song. "[We] had nothing to do with the selection of the song and wouldn't have selected it," insisted spokesman Howard Wolfson, who went on to blame the choice on an unnamed "sound guy." Rest assured. Next time they'll consult Tipper Gore first.

THE GOP GIVETH, AND THE GOP TAKETH: Low-wage workers celebrating the Senate's decision to raise the minimum wage may want to reconsider. Not only did Republican lawmakers lard up the bill with dubious tax cuts for the wealthy (see "Triangle Defense," by Ryan Lizza, page 17), but the measure may actually leave low-wage workers *worse* off than they are now. Here's why. Buried deep within the massive bill are two seemingly innocuous provisions. One would allow individuals to put more money into pensions and 401(k) plans. If an analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities is right, this will likely cause employers to pour more money into the pensions of the wealthiest employees and take money out of the pensions of lower-wage workers. A second provision is equally troubling. For years, the government would allow a business to deduct health insurance costs from its taxes—on the condition that the business offer insurance to all of its full-time employees. The Senate bill would accelerate an initiative allowing an individual buying insurance on his own to take this deduction, too. Why does this matter? Because, under the old system, if you were a small-business owner, it made more sense to have your business help finance insurance for your workers—and thus enjoy a tax break—than to shell out the money for your own insurance. The Senate bill alters the incentives: Lots of business owners would use the new tax break to buy insurance for themselves and stop providing coverage for employees. For well-paid workers, this might not be a problem: They are in high tax brackets, so a deduction would give them enough money to afford insurance. But for minimum-wage workers

it could be disastrous, since health insurance is prohibitively expensive for people of such modest means and the tax break means little to them. (In all fairness, there are sound reasons for changing the tax status of health insurance, but not without safeguards to prevent employers from dumping group insurance altogether.) When you add up the falling pensions and rising health insurance costs, the average minimum-wage worker would see his salary *fall* \$614 per year in real dollars under the Senate's bill. How much more GOP pandering can the American working class stand?

STRAW MAN: Human rights groups and several European governments are scrambling to keep General Augusto Pinochet, who's been under house arrest in London for 15 months, from returning to Chile. Four months after a British court ruled that the octogenarian former dictator could, indeed, be extradited from Britain to Spain to be tried for crimes against humanity, British Home Secretary Jack Straw declared on January 11 that, according to a team of

British doctors, Pinochet is medically unfit to stand trial. As a result, Pinochet may return home, where, by dint of his position as "Senator for Life," he has full immunity from prosecution. If Pinochet is truly sick, he should be permitted to return to Chile. Problem is, no one except Straw and a handful of other people actually knows. Pinochet agreed to be examined by British doctors only after securing an agreement with Straw to keep his medical records confidential. Belgium, France, Switzerland, and the human rights groups appealing Straw's decision to the British High Court haven't been granted access to the key evidence: Pinochet's medical records. "Full transparency is normally the rule," says Jose Miguel Vivanco, executive director of the Americas Division for Human Rights Watch. "Both parties should have full, unrestricted access to relevant evidence." Indeed, just as criminal procedure cannot be decided on the basis of secret evidence, neither should the decision to allow Pinochet to return to Chile. The medical documentation should be made available, without restriction, to both sides of the case. ■

V I N T ' S W E E K



Tallahassee Dispatch

All Against One

By DIANE ROBERTS

AND PEOPLE THOUGHT George W. was the Bush with problems. In the past several weeks, younger brother Jeb, Florida's governor, has watched two black legislators stage a sit-in at his office, been called a "plantation master," and been practically booed off the stage at a public meeting in Miami. The reason? His once-vaunted plan to replace affirmative action with something he calls the "One Florida" initiative.

When Jeb Bush was elected governor in 1998, it's safe to say that picking a fight over affirmative action was the furthest thing from his mind. After all, he had beaten Democrat Buddy MacKay by portraying himself as a racial healer—putting together a sort of Republican Rainbow Coalition, winning over Hispanics (with help from his Mexican-born wife) and garnering endorsements from several prominent black ministers and even some black Democrats. What's more, Bush wanted to make sure things went smoothly for his older brother when W. ran for president—which meant avoiding nasty brouhahas of any kind.

But, shortly after Jeb took office, the conservative black businessman Ward Connerly, who had spearheaded successful ballot initiatives against affirmative action in California and Washington, decided to take his road show to Florida. Connerly wanted a constitutional amendment eliminating the consideration of race in public university admissions and state hiring. "I have concluded there is a problem in Florida," Connerly declared.

Bush initially opposed Connerly's campaign, labeling it "divisive." But, when it became clear that Connerly had enough support to get the proposed amendment on the state ballot, Bush switched tactics. Rather than fight Connerly, he'd co-opt him. So, on November 9, Bush unveiled his "One Florida" initiative. Like Connerly's proposed constitutional amendment, "One Florida," by dint of executive order, ends race-based admissions at state colleges and race-based preferences in state contracting. But, unlike the amendment, "One Florida" tries to cushion the blow.

First, Bush's plan offsets any post-affirmative-action decrease in minority enrollment at state colleges by guaranteeing college admission to all Florida high school seniors who graduate in the top 20 percent of their class. Second, the plan tries to give minority businesses a continued leg up in government contracting by creating a statewide registration system to identify all minority vendors and making all

state-agency heads accountable to Bush, who has vowed to make minority contracts a priority. "This is not the end of affirmative action," Bush proclaimed. "This transcends affirmative action."

OR SO HE thought. Though Bush had spoken about "One Florida" to a handful of minority legislators, he discussed the plan only with those who were firmly in his camp. In fact, many of Florida's African American leaders were offended not as much by the details of the program as by the fact that they were not consulted. Then, during January's special legislative session on changing Florida's method of execution from the electric chair to lethal injection, Bush further angered black legislators by lobbying to limit appeals for death-row inmates, a disproportionate number of whom are black.

On January 19, Bush's supposedly happy melting pot boiled over. That was when State Senator Kendrick Meek, son of U.S. Representative Carrie Meek of Miami, and State Representative Tony Hill of Jacksonville—accompanied by nine members of the Tallahassee press corps—marched into Bush's finely appointed executive office suite, sat themselves down, and refused to move until the governor abandoned "One Florida."

Bush, who usually keeps his temper tantrums off-camera, threw a fit with the tape still rolling. "Kick their asses out!" he snarled in front of the reporters, before threatening that someone's life (it was not clear whether he meant the legislators' or his staff's) would be "made a living hell." For more than an hour, Bush aides "questioned" the TV reporter whose cameraman filmed the tirade, pressuring him not to use the tape. But the clip ended up on the nightly news despite their efforts. Bush later explained, unconvincingly, that the "asses" he wanted kicked out belonged to the journalists, who were somehow trespassing in a public building.

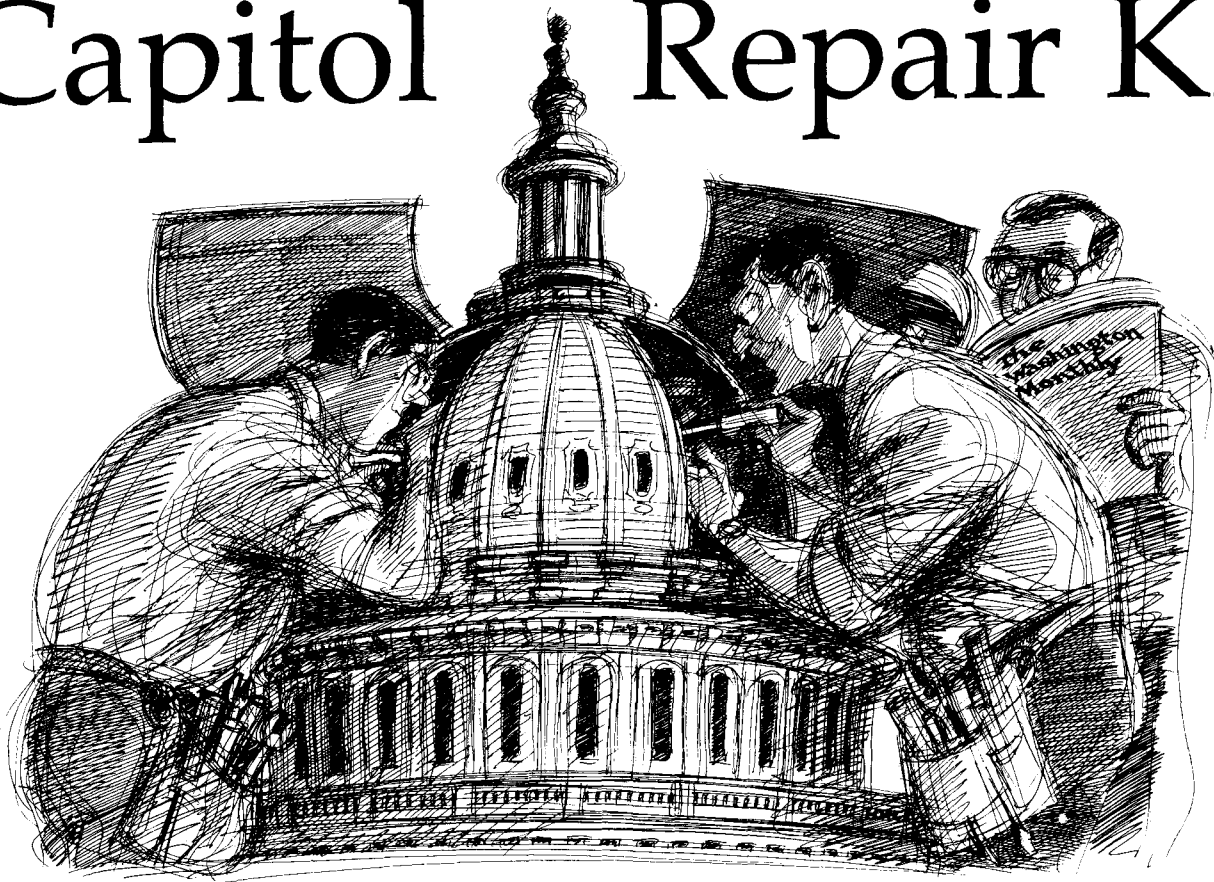
For their part, Meek and Hill continued their sit-in as colleagues gathered in the corridor outside Bush's office, which by then had been locked shut. Students from Florida A&M University also congregated in the hall, singing "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around" and "We Shall Overcome." At first, Bush tried to deny Meek and Hill access to food, but eventually a bucket of Church's fried chicken was allowed in. Hidden at the bottom of the bucket: Meek's cell-phone charger, so he could talk through the night to other legislators and supporters.

By the following afternoon, Bush was ready to make concessions, and the sit-in ended. Most significantly, he agreed to hold three public meetings on "One Florida" around the state. But the governor hasn't fared much better at those than he did at the sit-in. At the largest and most volatile meeting, held February 3 in Miami, more than 4,000 people jammed the Gusman Center for the Performing Arts for more than seven hours of venting. Meek, the baby-faced, 33-year-old state senator, was cheered like a rock star; the governor was booed and hissed. Of the 128 people who spoke, only one approved of Bush's initiative. The others spoke about slavery and Jim Crow. "Black folk ain't going back to no damn plantation!" yelled one man.

DIANE ROBERTS writes for *The St. Petersburg Times*.

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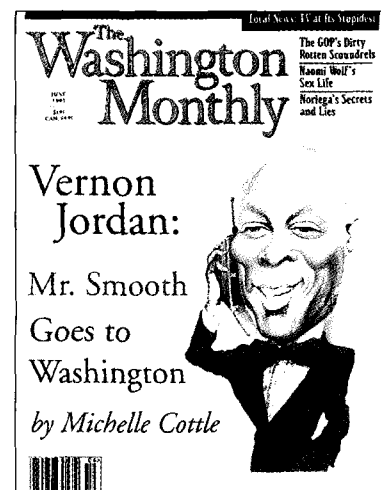
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Bush, for his part, seemed puzzled by the anger, urging the crowd to address his plan on its merits and complaining that "there's a lot of misunderstanding." When the meeting was over, Bush flew off to California to campaign and raise money for his brother.

The governor's harshest critics say that, with the "One Florida" flap, Bush is merely reverting to type. They point to Bush's 1994 gubernatorial campaign, when, running as an archconservative before eventually losing to Lawton Chiles, he was asked what he would do for black people as governor and famously replied, "Probably nothing."

More charitable critics, however, say the governor's problem isn't malice, it's incompetence: Bush has yet to learn that being governor is not like being a CEO. Decisions can't be made unilaterally. Moreover, when Bush does seek advice, he needs to cast a wider net. In this respect, "One Florida" is typical. An executive panel Bush appointed to study racial bias in the imposition of the death penalty is dominated by death-penalty advocates. Similarly, the governor's Everglades commission—which is charged with devising a conservation plan for the endangered land—includes, as a *St. Petersburg Times* editorial put it, "a rich diversity of sugar industry executives, agribusiness interests, developers and Republican politicians" but no independent environmentalists inclined to challenge the governor's views.

Those being frozen out are beginning to band together. On March 7, the first day of Florida's legislative session and one week before the state's presidential primary, environmentalists, anti-capital-punishment activists, and "One Florida" opponents will descend on Tallahassee for a giant protest march. While Bush delivers his State of the State address, the folks on the capitol steps will be making their own kind of noise. ■

Jakarta Dispatch Puppets

By VAUDINE ENGLAND

NO ONE SAID it would be easy. But, in the past couple of weeks, Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia's first democratically elected president in decades, has been navigating a particularly rough patch. It began January 31, when the National Commission on Human Rights issued a report accusing Indonesia's top military man, General Wiranto, of complicity in the military-backed rampage in East Timor last August. Wahid immediately called for Wiranto's resignation; Wiranto refused to budge. Indonesia's stock market and currency nose-dived amid rumors of an impending coup. Now Wahid is saying that, upon reflection, he's decided Wiranto is a "respectable person" who, if proven guilty, would get a presidential pardon. Has the president—and, by implication,

the movement for true democracy in a country accustomed to authoritarianism—been dealt a severe blow?

Actually, quite the opposite. In the weird and often confusing manner of Indonesian politics, Wahid's standoff with Wiranto marks not a defeat but a step toward putting the military in its place. Wahid's backpedaling is probably a clever strategy to provide Wiranto with a face-saving out—and it may yet succeed. But, even if Wiranto remains in power, the episode underscores the president's strength rather than his weakness vis-à-vis Indonesia's once dominant military.

A NEARLY BLIND cleric who for years led Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, Wahid has a long history of being underestimated. He did not officially run for the presidency and was not even seen as a candidate until after the national elections last June—whereupon representatives of the top vote-getting parties (no party received a majority) deemed him the best compromise choice. Wahid also has a reputation for ill-considered volubility—and he does seem to have an insatiable need to speak his mind in a society where openness was long punished. But since taking office he has made it clear that, when it comes to taking on the military, he is as much a man of action as a man of words.

This is no mean feat. Under Suharto, the military served as the president's right arm, constituting a powerful, repressive, and profitable parallel government that penetrated nearly every village. Yet, in three and a half months, Wahid has appointed a civilian defense minister and emasculated the formerly military-controlled state secretariat—which functions as a gatekeeper to the presidency—by abolishing key positions in the department. He has insisted that the generals in his Cabinet, including Wiranto, resign from the military in compliance with a law forbidding simultaneous civilian-military service, and he has replaced tainted army officers in the military with representatives from the navy and air force. When army spokesman and Wiranto loyalist Major General Sudrajat questioned the president's right to interfere in military matters, Wahid sacked him.

Wiranto, who rose through the ranks thanks to Suharto's sponsorship and, as coordinating minister for politics and security, is the top military man in the Cabinet, was clearly next in line. According to Jim Castle, a veteran analyst and business consultant with The Castle Group, "Wiranto had been targeted for some time." Indeed, Wahid had already cut back Wiranto's power by removing him as head of the armed forces. Then, on January 31, the National Commission on Human Rights provided Wahid with an opportunity to finish the job. In its report—compiled by its subsidiary, the Indonesian Inquiry on East Timor—the commission charged Wiranto and five others with responsibility for the rampage by pro-Jakarta militias that killed hundreds and destroyed much of East Timor following that territory's U.N.-administered independence vote last August. "Facts show the ... military apparatus ... cooperated with the militias," said Djoko Sugianto, chairman of the commission. And Albert Hasibuan, the inquiry's chairman, added that, as chief of Indonesia's armed forces at the time, Wiranto "knew what

VAUDINE ENGLAND is a Jakarta-based journalist.

happened but did not take effective measures to handle or prevent the violence.”

Wahid was in the midst of a two-week tour of Europe when the report was released, but he did not hesitate to respond. “I will ask him, to use a polite word, ask him to resign,” Wahid told reporters in Davos, Switzerland. Wiranto’s reply was equally swift. He called a press conference to demand due process and to announce that he had no intention of resigning on the basis of “assumptions.” Instead, he declared—smiling serenely—that “as a soldier, I am going to continue to fight to reveal the truth.”

Wiranto’s obstinacy rattled Jakarta. The long-feared confrontation between Wahid and the military seemed finally at hand. Wahid, then in The Hague, did not quiet national nerves when he announced that army generals had held a secret meeting in the capital; he also charged that “dirty hands” were using “Muslim militants” to whip up street protests against him. The reply from the army’s commander, General Tyasno Sudarto, was hardly more comforting. “I guarantee that, as an institution, the army will not launch a coup,” Sudarto said. But, he cautioned, the situation had become “dangerous and uncertain,” and “I have to be able to convince the army to remain solid.” The international community watched warily. Suddenly the fate of billions of dollars in aid and investment, not to mention of Indonesia’s democracy, seemed to hang in the balance.

But within days Wahid appeared to step back from the brink. Speaking from Rome, he announced, “I trust Mr. Wiranto.” Furthermore, he added, “If Mr. Wiranto is judged guilty by a court, I will forgive him.”

Observers scratched their heads. For one thing, it was unclear whether Wahid intended to give Wiranto immunity from any punishment or merely forgive him in his own heart. Wahid also added, “I still hope [Wiranto] resigns before I come back.” The ambiguity has prompted consternation in some circles in Jakarta. “We are reminding the president not to make statements that could cause confusion among the people,” said the speaker of Indonesia’s parliament.

BUT WAHID IS crazy like a fox. For all his posturing, Wiranto is in a weak position. Notwithstanding Suharto’s mentoring, Wiranto is a moderate within the military who lacks ties to the old guard, whose backing he would need to launch a coup. He also lacks support within the rest of the government. After Wiranto attended a Cabinet meeting last week, one minister reported that a majority in the Cabinet thought the general should quit. “He’s losing ground,” said the minister. As a result, notes a Western diplomat, “I don’t see what Wiranto thinks he can gain by hanging on.” Wiranto, many believe, wants to leave without appearing to have been fired. And, by softening his statements and offering immunity from prosecution, Wahid has made it easier for Wiranto to save face. One possibility is that Wiranto would take a temporary leave for the duration of the East Timor investigation. And there is speculation that Wahid and Wiranto have already

struck a deal whereby the general would leave permanently in exchange for assurances that he would never see the inside of a courtroom. In short, says Castle, “Wahid is not as wacky or spontaneous as people think. There is a method to his madness.”

Of course, it’s still possible that Wiranto won’t leave. But, even if he doesn’t, the episode has illustrated not Wahid’s weakness but his strength. For, despite the jitters in Jakarta, there was never actually much danger of a coup. It is not merely that Wiranto is incapable of galvanizing the military’s old guard. Serious as its grievances with the new civilian regime may be, the army cannot help but recognize that Indonesia’s newly emboldened citizenry would bring the country to a standstill if soldiers were to seize power. International support, and the investment and aid it brings, would disappear. The price of military intervention is far too high. “These [officers] are not stupid people,” says Harold Crouch, a senior fellow at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies in Canberra, Australia. “They know they could not govern at the moment.”

Wahid knows it, too. That’s why he’s already moved on to his next target. On February 6, the president declared that a former armed forces chief, retired General Feisal Tanjung, ordered an attack on the party headquarters of then-opposition leader (and current vice president) Megawati Sukarnoputri in 1996. That attack sparked the opposition movement that less than two years later brought down Suharto. Feisal has strongly denied the charge. But, says Wahid, “I’m sticking to my version.”

Indonesians, for their part, are starting to compare Wahid to one of the characters in the traditional *wayang kulit*, or puppet dramas, performed before backlit screens across the archipelago. The president, they say, is like the apparently bumbling yet deadly comic Semar, who uses his court-jester role (and the breaking of wind) to vanquish his more dangerous-looking enemies. So far, at least, the role fits. ■

Moscow Dispatch

Missing

By MASHA GESSEN

ABOUT A MONTH ago, a Russian human rights activist described to me a publicity stunt she and her friends had dreamed up the night before. “We want to nominate Andrei Babitsky for the Hero of Russia medal,” she said. Babitsky, a reporter with the U.S.-funded, Russian-language Radio Liberty, was the only journalist still filing from the Chechen side of the front line. His dispatches, broadcast on an AM frequency in Russia, regularly contradicted the military’s claims that it was fighting a successful and targeted

MASHA GESSEN is chief correspondent at *Itogi*, the Russian partner to *Newsweek*.

battle against terrorists, with practically no civilian casualties. So suggesting that he receive the nation's highest military award seemed like a good way to poke the Kremlin in the eye. But, as it turns out, Babitsky may deserve the honor even more than the human rights activists imagined. For he has now disappeared—apparently at the hands of Acting President Vladimir Putin's regime. As a result, he may really be the latest hero in what increasingly appears to be a losing fight for freedom of expression in Putin's Russia.

During the first Chechen war, which lasted from 1994 to 1996, Babitsky was one of several dozen Russian journalists who regularly crossed the front line. But when fighting broke out this time around, in August 1999, the Russian government put unprecedented restrictions on the media. Only two journalists, Babitsky and Reuters correspondent Maria Eismont, braved them to report regularly from the besieged city of Grozny.

In late December, the two reporters began receiving unmistakable signs that Russian security officials were unhappy with their activities. Arriving in Moscow from the Caucasus around New Year's Eve, Eismont was detained at the airport together with another journalist—a Russian national employed by the Associated Press—and a refugee from Grozny traveling with her. “We had clearly been fingered,” says Eismont. “There were all sorts of people on that plane, including Chechens, rich people, apparently homeless people, but they seized upon the three of us.” The trio was threatened, in no uncertain terms, with trumped-up narcotics and weapons charges. They finally got away with a hefty bribe, but afterward Eismont received what she calls “indirect and unofficial warnings” from the Federal Security Service (FSB)—the successor agency to the KGB—that an excuse for arresting her could be found. Reuters heeded the warnings, and Eismont did not return to Grozny after the New Year. And then there was one.

BABITSKY'S FIRST WARNING came in early January, when his wife, Lyudmila, went to pick up photographs he had dropped off at a supermarket photo shop. She was greeted by men who identified themselves as FSB agents. They seized the photographs and interrogated her (Babitsky himself was in Chechnya). Lyudmila reported the incident to human rights groups, who decided to stage a publicity stunt. A couple of days later, the human rights activist told me about the medal idea. We were seated next to each other at the trial of one of the many Moscow Chechens framed on drug and arms charges following the September bomb blasts that shook Moscow and signaled the beginning of the second Chechen war.

“Do you know what the nomination procedure is for Hero of Russia?” the human rights activist asked me. I answered that I didn't and that it said a lot about the gap between the government and human rights groups that she needed to go to a journalist to find out an official procedure.

The gap turned out to be wider than we had suspected. That day, January 14, was the last time Babitsky phoned home. On January 25 Lyudmila Babitsky decided to go public about her husband's disappearance.

Rumors that the Russian government was responsible began circulating immediately. They were confirmed first by a phone call, then by a leak, and then, finally, by an official statement. On January 27 Lyudmila Babitsky received a phone call from someone who identified himself as a prosecutor in a region of Chechnya held by the federal side. He said her husband was alive but refused to disclose his whereabouts. The following day, the state news agency, ITAR-TASS, reported—citing unnamed sources—that Babitsky had been detained by federal police and would be charged with fighting on the rebel side. The next day Sergei Yastrzhembsky, Putin's spokesman on Chechnya, repeated this absurd assertion.

Over the next two days, the federal government seemed to scramble to better justify Babitsky's detention. Yastrzhembsky told reporters Babitsky would be released shortly and delivered to Moscow—on the condition that he not leave the capital until the investigation ended. Meanwhile, a small icon seized from Babitsky was flown to Moscow for evaluation: the government apparently hoped to get him on antiques-smuggling charges, but the icon was valued at ten rubles, or about 35 cents.

Then, on February 3, Yastrzhembsky made a startling announcement. At his daily briefing in Moscow, he told reporters that Babitsky had just been exchanged for three Russian soldiers held by Chechen rebels. “Now all responsibility for Babitsky's life lies with the other side,” concluded the upbeat spokesman.

OVER THE FOLLOWING days, the story was alternately clarified and muddled. The number of soldiers said to have been traded for Babitsky was reduced to two. An FSB spokesman accused the West of spending \$1.5 million to bribe Russian journalists to defame the federal military—implying, in short, that Babitsky was a foreign agent. Russia's highest-ranking military spokesman, Valery Manilov, said that “it was not an exchange: he was released and voluntarily went over to where he was greeted with open arms,” adding, “We will aid efforts to save the life of this lost sheep.” The acting justice minister said he knew nothing of the alleged exchange. The prosecutor general's office announced that Babitsky had been summoned for interrogation in Moscow and that, if he didn't show, a warrant would be issued for his arrest.

Chechen officials, meanwhile, disavowed any knowledge of the supposed exchange. The daily newspaper *Segodnya* (Today) printed an interview with an unnamed FSB officer who said the exchange was a hoax intended to either eliminate Babitsky altogether or keep him out of sight until after the March presidential election. The FSB then produced an undated videotape of the alleged exchange, in which Babitsky, a notorious bon vivant and publicity hound, looks strikingly dejected and asks that the camera be turned off. This seemed to contradict the government's claim that Babitsky had volunteered to be exchanged. Compounding that impression, in the five days since the exchange supposedly took place, he still had not called his wife or his bureau.

The whole strange story of the exchange may turn out to

be a hoax or a swindle thought up by Chechen bandits hoping to get an expensive U.S.-employed journalist in exchange for two worthless Russian servicemen. Or it may be an incompetent attempt at covering up an act of police brutality that resulted in Babitsky's death. Just as troubling as what has actually happened is the way the story is being told. Yastrzhembsky, the highest-ranking p.r. hack in the country and a career diplomat (he served as Russia's consul in the Czech Republic), clearly sees nothing wrong with treating a journalist as a prisoner of war—or as what in Soviet times would have been referred to as an “enemy of the state.” Indeed, the incident is disturbingly reminiscent of one of the more notorious episodes in Soviet history: when Vladimir Bukovsky, a dissident writer who had spent years in psychiatric detention, was exchanged for Chilean Communist Luis Corvalan, jailed by Augusto Pinochet, then president of Chile.

AND BABITSKY'S DETENTION is only one of many signs that the Putin administration has redoubled its propaganda efforts. Yastrzhembsky's post was created in January, and he has since announced that he will be creating a new set of accreditation policies. When Yastrzhembsky was Yeltsin's spokesman, he had a habit of shutting out journalists he disliked. So it seems likely that his new system of accreditation will be aimed at further blocking journalists who refuse to toe the party line from effectively covering the war. Meanwhile, at the end of January, a new head of the All-Russia Television and Radio Broadcasting Company, which also includes one of Russia's two largest wire services, was appointed. The mogul, Oleg Dobrodeyev, one of the founders of Russia's main private-TV channel, is a hawk on Chechnya who will surely beef up state television's war coverage with better footage and slicker packaging—all the better to convince the Russian public of the righteousness of the war in Chechnya.

The new propaganda efforts come at a logical time: the presidential election is less than two months away, victory in Chechnya does not seem as assured as it did a couple of months ago, and some—though not all—polls show support for the war waning. Still, a clear majority of Russians back the war, and a clear majority will vote for Putin—especially now that several potential contenders have bowed out of the race. The new propaganda push, then, is probably less a function of desperation or fear than of self-assured anger. The government's goal in the Babitsky affair was not to silence a journalist whose reporting was threatening but to squash a pest whose scribbling was merely annoying. That is how secure in its thuggery Russia's “democratic” government has become.

The result is that journalists now feel as powerless as everyone else in Russia. “I get really scared now,” says Maria Eismont. “Sometimes, when I start the car, I wonder if it's going to explode. But other times I just want to go kill one of them. When I listen to Manilov or Yastrzhembsky talk about Babitsky, I just want to take a gun and go shoot one of them in the head. I don't mind sacrificing ten years of my life for that.” Note to Russian prosecutors: Eismont is just being rhetorical; please don't charge her with attempted murder. ■

On the Hill Triangle Defense

By RYAN LIZZA

“THE PRESIDENT IDENTIFIED some worthy goals in his speech,” gushed House Majority Leader Dick Armey after the State of the Union address last month: “expanding health coverage to the uninsured, holding HMOs accountable and making prescription drugs affordable to all seniors, among others.” A few days later, when the House and Senate leadership met with President Clinton, Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle listened to Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott and House Speaker Dennis Hastert describe their legislative agenda, then said, “Mr. President, this may be a first. I'm able to agree with every single word of both my Republican colleagues.” Soon after that, the Republican-run Senate voted overwhelmingly to raise the minimum wage. And now the GOP has ended its longstanding objection to allowing patients to sue their HMOs.

Education, health care, the minimum wage? Welcome to the Republican Congress of the new millennium. Strategy: Stop letting the Democrats steal our issues and start stealing theirs. According to a recent article in *Roll Call*, aides to Hastert say the GOP plan is to “triangulate.” That means abandoning core conservative principles, giving popular Democratic proposals a light Republican touch-up, and then painting the Democrats as extremists when they object.

A good strategy—if the Republicans were really following it. The problem is that triangulation, at its heart, is about selling out your own side. It's a strategy for political victory premised on a willingness to concede ideological defeat. And the Republicans, their “compassionate” posturing notwithstanding, aren't actually throwing their unpopular, hard-right principles overboard. The conventional wisdom is that Republicans are in full retreat. If only they were. Then they might finally win.

The problem starts, as it so often does for the GOP, with taxes. Despite all their rhetorical mimicking of Democratic themes, the heart of the Republican plan is lots of tax cuts. Last year, the GOP gambled everything on a spectacularly unpopular \$800 billion tax cut that Clinton loudly vetoed. So is Hastert pushing a smaller, better-targeted tax cut this year? No, he's simply breaking up last year's giant bill into smaller proposals pegged to seemingly popular themes like the marriage penalty, education savings accounts, health care, and, probably, the estate tax. “We could have weeks of on-and-off debate about Republicans voting for tax cuts,” says anti-tax lobbyist Grover Norquist.

The Democrats hope he's right. They're already predicting that the total price tag of the numerous tax proposals will exceed last year's single bill. And George W. Bush's drubbing in New Hampshire makes them even more confident than they were last year that voters would rather use the budget

surplus for education, Social Security, or debt reduction.

Hastert's first order of business is marriage-penalty relief, which, if done correctly, might be a winning issue. Clinton and the Democrats say they'd support some remedy, and, if the Republicans wanted, they could pass modest legislation, watch Clinton sign it, and claim victory. But instead the GOP has proposed a \$182 billion bill that Clinton will never sign. Nearly two-thirds of its tax cuts benefit the top 25 percent of income earners, and about half of the bill's "relief" is targeted at couples who already receive a *bonus* for being married. In other words, the bill is simply a huge tax cut for married couples rather than a technical fix of a quirk in the IRS code.

When Democrats saw the Republican plan, they breathed a sigh of relief. "Fortunately," laughs one Democratic staffer, "the Republicans have not even given us something that is sort of close but no cigar."

By contrast, the White House proposal targets couples likely to actually face marriage penalties and costs a modest but significant \$45 billion. Turns out the person who's really triangulating is the same person who's been doing it all along: Clinton.

On the minimum wage, Republicans also seemed close to stealing the Democrats' thunder. A minimum-wage hike is a simple law to write. But the Republican-sponsored increase the Senate passed on February 2 is 114 pages long. Why? Because, while it takes only two pages to raise the minimum wage, it takes 112 to shoehorn \$76 billion in tax cuts into the legislation. The cuts are ostensibly to soften a wage increase's blow to small business, but many have nothing whatsoever to do with the actual impact of the hike. One section of the bill caters to high-income individuals with pensions, even though most small businesses don't offer pension plans. Another is the infamous "three martini lunch" provision, which allows businesses to deduct from their taxes 80 percent of their expenditures on business meals and drinks, instead of the current 50 percent. Many of the provisions are recycled from last year's vetoed tax bill. And, overall, the price tag of the tax cuts is three times greater than the cost of the wage increase to businesses.

To make matters worse, while some of the tax breaks take effect right away, the minimum wage will be raised over the course of three years. Democrats will push their own minimum-wage bill—with the increase spread over two years

and a much smaller package of tax cuts. And they are salivating over the legislative piñata the GOP has handed them. "It's tax cuts for the rich now," says one staffer previewing the Democratic script, "and delayed wage increases for the poor."

Then there's the supposed GOP cave-in on the patients' bill of rights. Last year, when Hastert tried to bury a bipartisan HMO bill, 68 Republicans joined the Democrats to pass it. The vote was widely seen as the biggest slap in the face to the Republican leadership since the 1994 takeover. Now a conference committee is supposed to work out a compromise between the House legislation and a much weaker Senate bill. But Hastert has stacked the committee with ten Congressmen who voted against the bill in the House, which is technically against House rules. His way around the rules: The conferees support a section of the bill that includes—you

guessed it—a package of tax cuts worth \$50 billion over the next ten years. Democrats struck back last week by passing a motion instructing the House conferees to fight for the part of the bill dealing with managed care reform, not the tax cuts.

Republicans, having recently made a minor concession by agreeing to a right-to-sue provision, now insist that Democrats accept some of the tax cuts in return. But why should they? By refusing to bite the bullet and support HMO reform on its own, the GOP has once again played into the Democrats' hands.

Why can't the GOP get it right? Some suggest that the Bush camp has been pressuring the congressional Republican leadership to make sure

nothing gets passed. Bush doesn't want done to him what was done to Bob Dole in 1996, when Clinton signed the welfare reform bill, taking Dole's best campaign issue off the table. Some GOP members probably also figure that, on traditionally Democratic issues, the White House will get credit for any compromise, so why make one? But the real explanation is probably the simplest one. Triangulation is a desperate strategy. To accept an ideological sellout, your backers have to be pretty sure they're on the wrong side of history. The GOP still retains Congress and still won't accept that, on issue after issue, it's not just their rhetoric that's unpopular with voters, it's their substance. The congressional Republicans, despite their disastrous past five years, still haven't been slapped around hard enough. By this time next year, that may no longer be a problem. ■





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Israel's coming Lebanon disaster.

Barak's Children

By Yossi Klein Halevi

FOR HEZBOLLAH, DEAD fighters become martyrs; for the Israeli public, they become children. In the national mind, each fallen Israeli soldier is transformed into a teenager. We learn about the girlfriend he was going to marry, the trip to India he was planning with his buddies after his discharge, the grandmother who survived the Holocaust but doesn't know how she'll survive this.

As the newspaper photos of dead children accumulate—six soldiers killed in Lebanon during the past two weeks, the highest number in the past year—the Israeli public increasingly resembles a family of hysterical mourners. It is making two demands on its government: to hit back hard for every loss and to unilaterally withdraw, in that order. Ehud Barak, who fears those responses could undermine a deal with Syria, wants to do neither. He will probably be forced to do both.

Barak has gambled his government's credibility—including his election promises to make peace in the region and to stimulate the Israeli economy and reduce unemployment—on a deal with Hafez al-Assad. And so Barak initially refrained from retaliating, fearing that widening the conflict into yet another large-scale and ultimately ineffectual Lebanese military campaign would doom the already stalled talks with Syria. But Israelis, grieving and guilty over sending

their children to fight a losing and perhaps senseless war, gave him no choice.

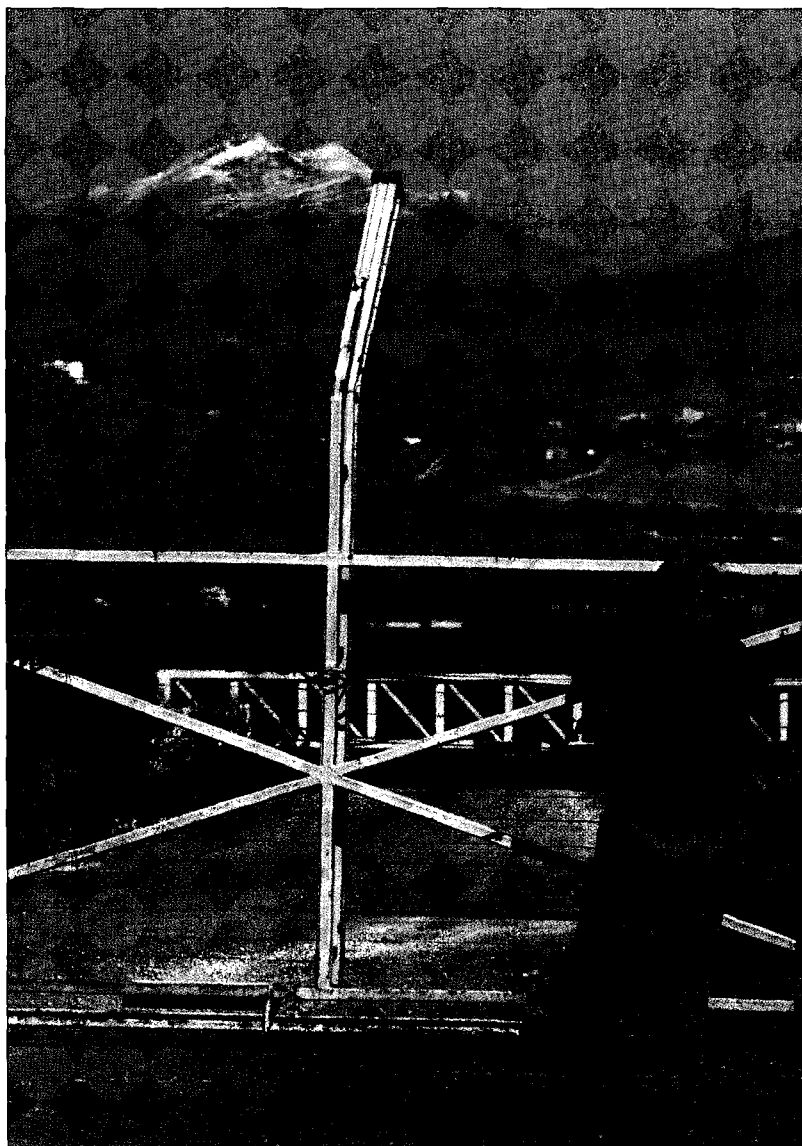
The Lebanon death toll also touched another Israeli sensitivity: the obsessive fear of being played for a fool. In the Israeli lexicon there is no worse epithet than *freier*—Hebrew slang for “sucker.” Israelis may have lost their enthusiasm for military glory and for proving that Jews can fight as well as anyone else, but they don't like being taken for suckers, either personally or collectively. When Barak sent planes to attack Lebanese power stations on February 7, he was not only trying to calm an outraged Israeli public—he was proving he wasn't Assad's *freier*.

Indeed, the suspicion that Assad was playing Barak for a fool was growing even before the killings in Lebanon. Even many Israelis who favor a Golan Heights withdrawal weren't pleased when Barak agreed to meet with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara instead of Assad himself. They were even less pleased when al-Shara declined to shake Barak's hand. Many Israelis believe Barak's refusal to defend his—and Israel's—honor emboldened Assad to raise the humiliation ante by conditioning the renewal of talks on a written pledge by Israel to withdraw to its June 4, 1967, borders, giving Syria access to the Sea of Galilee, Israel's main

reservoir. That precondition would turn Barak into the ultimate *freier*: conceding everything—including parts of sovereign Israel that fall within the 1967 borders—before substantive negotiations even begin.

Then came the editorial in the official Syrian newspaper, *Tishreen*, accusing the Zionists of inventing the Holocaust. Israelis waited for Barak, who is leading the international boycott of Austria over Jörg Haider, to denounce Syria's new status as the world's first Holocaust-denial state. But he swallowed that insult too—only days after he'd publicly praised Assad yet again as a strong leader and a man of his word.

And now it appears Assad has engineered the escalation in Lebanon. It is hardly a coincidence that Hez-



AP PHOTO/EVAL WARSHANSKY

Yossi Klein Halevi is a senior writer for *The Jerusalem Report*.

bollah substantially increased its attacks just when the Israeli-Syrian talks collapsed. According to Israeli military intelligence, the number of Iranian weapons headed to Hezbollah through Damascus Airport has increased. The debate here is whether Assad is actively encouraging Hezbollah to attack or only winking.

Assad's purpose in heightening tensions is to remind Israelis that peace on the northern border depends on him and to pressure Barak into agreeing to the 1967 lines around the Sea of Galilee. But Assad may have gone one humiliation too far. Barak can ignore personal slights and even Holocaust denial; he can't ignore dead Israeli teenagers. And, because he can't, he may do more than retaliate; he may unilaterally withdraw from Lebanon—which would represent the greatest threat of all to an Israeli-Syrian deal.

BARAK BEGAN HIS term as prime minister by promising to withdraw from Lebanon by July 2000. That was a threat intended to force Assad to the negotiating table, since an Israeli withdrawal would strip him of his best card—peace in Lebanon—with which to get back the Golan. The bluff worked, perhaps too well. For the Israeli public was also listening, and it took Barak at his word. It will almost certainly compel him to honor his own timetable, with or without Syrian consent.

Barak's promise has transformed unilateral withdrawal from a marginal left-wing cause into a national consensus embraced even by Likud leader Ariel Sharon, architect of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. In fact, the right now sees withdrawal from Lebanon as the most effective way to forestall a withdrawal from the Golan, since it denies Barak a key selling point with the Israeli public for any future agreement with Syria.

But Barak knows that a unilateral withdrawal without Syrian approval could end in war. Withdrawal will rightly be perceived in the Arab world as a sign of Israeli weakness—the first war Israel ever lost—prompting further attacks. And an aggrieved Assad, deprived of his Lebanon leverage, will be keenly interested in reminding Israelis that only he can deliver quiet on their northern border. If Hezbollah attacks the Galilee, Israel's retaliation will be severe, if only to refute the growing sense in the Arab world that the Jewish state is losing its will. But allowing the July deadline to lapse without withdrawing is hardly a more attractive option. Barak would likely lose what is left of his credibility and face a revolt by the war-weary Israeli public that could even result in draft resistance.

Barak could, of course, still try to reach an agreement with the Syrians over the Golan before the summer. For instance, he could devise a "creative solution" for the area around the Sea of Galilee that would turn the disputed 1967 borders into an extraterritorial or jointly supervised free-trade zone—in hopes of convincing the Israeli public that he hasn't given away everything, while convincing the Syrians that he has. But that won't work either. Assad will settle for nothing less than what Israel gave Anwar Sadat—whom Assad denounced at the time as a traitor for negotiating with the Zionists. And what Sadat got was every last inch of occupied Sinai,

including the Israeli hotel on the border.

The final option is simply to give in to Assad and sign a written pledge to withdraw to the 1967 borders. But then Barak will be damned as a *freier* and will probably lose the national referendum he has promised on the Golan. Especially now, after Assad's attempt to impose peace by humiliation, the Israeli public is in no mood for capitulation.

"Out of the north evil shall break forth," Israelis like to quote from Jeremiah whenever Lebanon turns lethal. These days that biblical warning sounds like a taunt aimed at Ehud Barak. ■

Johannesburg Dispatch

Cop Out

By JONNY STEINBERG

THE SOUTH AFRICAN police kill about 480 suspects every year, but curbing police brutality was the last thing on Minister of Safety and Security Steve Tshwete's mind as he spoke to 1,500-plus policemen in Soweto's Jabulani Amphitheater last July 12. A former anti-apartheid firebrand who used to whip up protesters in similar stadiums around the country before they clashed with the riot police waiting outside, Tshwete—who has since taken to swaggering about in dark glasses like a homegrown parody of Al Capone—urged that the violence of yore be loosed against his new enemies: South Africa's criminals. "We are going to deal with [them] as a bulldog deals with a bone," he bellowed to rapturous applause. "We will unleash the might of the state upon them."

Why the thuggish rhetoric? Optimists answer that, after a half-hearted start under Nelson Mandela, South Africa's new president, Thabo Mbeki, has taken crime by the scruff of the neck. The truth, though, is less cheery. Unable to afford the grassroots policing South Africa really needs, Mbeki's government is trying to distract the public by talking tough and subtly blaming its failures on South Africa's post-apartheid human rights laws. Indeed, the due-process liberalism that thrived in the immediate aftermath of Mandela's takeover is growing less popular by the week on both sides of the racial divide. Tshwete is only the most visible manifestation.

In fairness to Mbeki, the president confronts a horrendous problem. For the past decade, South Africa has been engulfed in a crime wave of epic proportions. Even the police are frequent victims, with as many as 20 killed every month, often for their guns. This, as one might imagine, does not inspire confidence. "When policemen are being bumped off for their firearms, citizens start wondering whether the state is even remotely capable of defending

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them,” explains Antoinette Louw, senior researcher at the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria.

The result has been an epidemic of mob justice. Barely a week passes without reports of citizens taking the law into their own hands. Last July, hundreds of residents of Winnie Mandela Park, a poverty-stricken shack settlement 15 miles east of Johannesburg, pitched in to pay the bail of a local man charged with murdering his neighbor. The day he was released, the bail-payers dragged him from his home, conducted a cursory “trial” on the street, and then doused him with gasoline and set him on fire. The message to the government was clear: If you won’t punish criminals, we will.

It’s not that the government isn’t trying. Mbeki has taken important steps to counter the massive growth in organized crime that has threatened this fledgling democratic state since it opened up to the world in the early ‘90s. He has, for example, created a new elite security force modeled on and trained by the FBI and Scotland Yard, as well as a new authority to seize the proceeds of criminals in civil court.

But, when it comes to fighting street crime, Mbeki’s hands are tied by South Africa’s lackluster economic growth and his own unswerving commitment to keeping the annual deficit below three percent of GDP. As a result, more than six months into his term, South Africa’s police force remains woefully inadequate. About 30 percent of its officers are functionally illiterate, and, in the northern Johannesburg suburb where I live, only two squad cars patrol 26 square miles of a densely populated and violent city.

But Mbeki dares not admit these constraints to South Africa’s anxious voters. Instead, he’s embarked on a campaign to at least *appear* tough on crime—appointing leaders like Tshwete and giving the criminal justice system the merciless face he believes South Africans want to see. The problem is that Mbeki’s new toughness often clashes with South Africa’s bill of rights. And some suspect this is exactly what the president wants—since it lets him divert popular anger to the judiciary, the defenders of South Africa’s fledgling culture of civil liberties.

MBEKI IS UNWITTINGLY aided in his campaign by South Africa’s criminal justice officials, who take the country’s new human rights regime to crazy extremes. A law drafted in 1997 stipulates that policemen may use lethal force only in defense of human life. (The old law permitted lethal force for crimes ranging from murder to forgery to voluntary homosexual sodomy.) Policemen have interpreted this to mean they can shoot only while being fired upon themselves, and thus they believe that the new law is designed to get them killed. Tshwete, instead of defusing the situation with a dose of sanity, has given credence to this crazy interpretation. “I do not want you to feel frightened when you are on the streets,” he told an audience of several thousand police officers in August. “If a law ties your hands behind your back, I will approach parliament for relief.”

Similar stories abound. A clause in the new constitution gives accused persons “the right to be released from deten-

tion if the interests of justice permit.” Magistrates have interpreted this to mean that they must give all suspects bail. The result is that professional hit men and heavily armed gang members have been released on bail, only to commit murder a few days later.

Public outcry over the bail clause was, understandably, vehement. But, instead of explaining that junior judicial officers had misinterpreted the bill of rights, the government endorsed their understanding of it and used the public relations opening to draft a severe new bail law, which it then challenged South Africa’s constitutional court to strike down.

The new law denies bail to those accused of carjacking, rape, or premeditated murder unless “exceptional circumstances” exist. It also denies bail in cases when the prisoner’s release may incite public disorder, creating an extraordinary situation in which a person’s freedom can be denied because of the actions of others. On the day they reviewed the law, South Africa’s eleven usually intimidating constitutional-court justices were uncharacteristically subdued, asking the administration’s representative a series of quiet, respectful questions. The night before the court upheld the legislation, a senior African National Congress politician triumphantly told me that constitutional-court President Arthur Chaskalson was “shitting in his green robes. If he dares touch this law,” the politician said, “his court will become the most reviled institution in the country.”

SO FAR MBEKI’S approach seems to be paying off—at least politically. The public heartily approves of the new bail law. As for Tshwete, South Africans adore him. From besieged white farmers in the South African hinterland to the working-class residents of urban black townships, Tshwete has captivated South Africa’s vengeful imagination with his talk of blood and revenge. Among whites, 98 percent of whom vote for opposition parties, Tshwete is undoubtedly the most popular member of Mbeki’s government.

But, if South Africans love what they’re hearing today, they may soon come to regret it. Mbeki’s public relations campaign is unlikely to actually control crime. In fact, inviting a police force schooled in the not-so-gentle methods of apartheid security to get tough could actually make it harder to punish criminals. In contrast to the old days, victims of police brutality now have access to public defenders and a reasonably impartial judiciary. If police officers take Tshwete literally, South Africa’s courts will be inundated with cases of illegal arrest and involuntary evidence. In a country where only two percent of reported carjackings end in convictions, the last thing the courts need is a systemic disregard for evidentiary procedures.

Most disturbing of all is the long-term damage Mbeki’s strategy may do to human rights in South Africa. A constitutional court intimidated in one sphere soon becomes quiet elsewhere. And, with one party set to govern South Africa for a generation, South Africans may be silencing one of the few institutions that can stand up to their leaders when they violate the principles upon which the new South Africa was supposed to rest. ■

Campaign Journal

Open Season

By MICHELLE COTTLE

MYRTLE BEACH, SOUTH CAROLINA

YOU SEE A lot of roadkill in South Carolina. The climate is temperate, the possums plentiful. Two-lane highways snake through miles of densely wooded countryside. I myself nearly take down a large goat as I speed along Route 378 at two o'clock in the morning. And, with each fresh carcass my headlights illuminate, I'm reminded of George W. Bush's desperate hope that John McCain's presidential aspirations will wind up in a similar condition—flattened and forgotten along some dark back road of the Palmetto State.

These are trying times for W. and the Republican establishment. What was supposed to be a quick 'n' easy nomination has turned into an ugly knife fight, sending the Bush camp into near meltdown. Terrified by McCain's New Hampshire landslide, Bush's staff is tacking hard right in South Carolina, groveling before evangelicals and plotting a multi-front smear campaign with pro-tobacco and anti-abortion groups. The goal is to brand McCain with the ultimate political stigma: that he is Clintonesque. And, while arguing that McCain is Clinton, they've also begun claiming that Bush is McCain, the real political outsider, the one who cares about Social Security and veterans, the one who is, as the campaign's new slogan trumpets, "A Reformer with Results."

Despite the incoming flak—or perhaps because of it—life on McCain's Straight Talk Express could not be merrier. On the Friday after the senator's New Hampshire blowout, staff members are gabbing with reporters, snarfing down donuts, reveling in the latest fund-raising and poll numbers, and fielding phone calls from well-wishers. "Since New Hampshire, I've gotten calls from people I haven't heard from in forever," grins one young staffer, cell phone in hand. The buses are rolling toward yet another rally, this one at a restaurant in Myrtle Beach. No one pays any attention to where we're going until the buses round the final corner and a member of the campaign announces brightly, "Of course, the event is being held in the tackiest building for miles around."

"Disneyesque" might be more appropriate. Our destination is one of those medieval theme restaurants where men in tight pants and brightly hued capes run at each other with swords for the amusement of diners. Pennants flutter atop the roof of the main "castle," a mural depicting knights and minstrels runs the length of one wall, and a massive, yellow-and-white tentlike structure sits just across the driveway (for jousting, of course). McCain supporters, joined by three strapping lads in faux chain mail and a woman decked out like Maid Marian, line the drawbridge to the castle's front gate. The logic behind the locale becomes clear as members of the traveling press begin spinning self-consciously cornball leads for the day's stories: "Today, Senator John McCain

stepped up his crusade for the Republican nomination"; "Today, John McCain challenged rival George W. Bush to meet on the fields of battle." More reform-themed coverage for the man journalists love to love.

Inside the Hall of Kings, the scene is even more surreal—giant tapestries, coats of arms, fake iron chandeliers flickering with electric candles. Three suits of armor flank the platform where McCain will speak. The hall is cavernous, and it is packed. People are standing on tables, in doorways, behind the stage. When McCain at last enters, the crowd goes wild. There are many, many veterans in attendance, waving miniature American flags. One woman carries a sign that reads: REPLACE A BUM WITH A REAL AMERICAN HERO.

Representative Mark Sanford opens with a brief explanation of why he's backing McCain. "There's a real need for conservative reform in guvahment," drawls the congressman. The crowd clearly agrees: the veterans flap their flags so hard that it's a miracle no one loses an eye. When his moment comes, McCain takes the reform theme a step further. "On Tuesday night," he proclaims, "a campaign ended and a great national crusade began." The time has arrived, vows McCain, "to give you back your government." As it turns out, military reform is the main topic of this morning's event, but McCain folds everything from tax relief to the ultra-sticky subject of abortion under the "reform" umbrella. At a lunchtime rally up the road in Florence, the senator switches from military to education reform, while the crowd munches contentedly on catfish stew and biscuits. Schools, taxes, the military, Medicare—you name the issue, McCain says the real issue is reform, especially campaign finance reform. "We have to break the iron triangle of lobbyists, big money, and legislation," he intones a dozen times a day. Only then, he says, can the American people—especially young people—reconnect with their government. (Insert thunderous applause here.)

Without question, McCain's reform crusade resonates with an electorate that senses that—economic prosperity notwithstanding—somehow, somewhere, something has gone wrong with our government. There's nothing particularly Republican about the message, except that the guy in the White House is a Democrat. Indeed, in New Hampshire, McCain pulled 40 percent of the Republican vote, but a whopping 60 percent of independents. And much of his support in South Carolina comes from swing voters and Democrats, a fair number of whom turn out for the senator's speeches. "I know quality when I see and hear it," says Burt Wilson, one of several Dems at the Florence event. Impressed with McCain's character and message, Wilson has started recruiting fellow Democrats to the senator's camp. "You gonna vote with us?" a local Republican calls over to Wilson. "You know we can't win unless Democrats vote with us."

McCain's campaign strategists know it, too. But they also know that, in a nasty primary battle, having their candidate appear as anything other than 100 percent Republican could hurt him badly among the GOP loyalists who turn out on primary day. It's a precarious balance not only because many Democrats and independents like McCain *because* he bucks his party's leadership, but because McCain clearly can't stand that leadership himself.

Twenty-four hours later, on a rainy Saturday afternoon in

San Francisco, he practically says so to their face. Having hopped a jet from South Carolina the night before, McCain now stands on the dais in the Grand Peninsula Ballroom of the airport Hyatt. Before him sit some 1,200 California Republicans gathered for the party's semiannual state convention. McCain is the keynote speaker for today's sold-out lunch. (George W. has, for a second time, declined to attend the convention.) The program has barely begun, the senator has yet to say a word, and already he has received three standing ovations—not bad when you consider that this is not a McCain rally but a meeting of the party's establishment. But the senator has a few choice words for the crowd

"I'm very sorry Governor Bush couldn't be here today," McCain tells the audience. "But I've been told he's back home in Austin working on his new book, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to My Coronation*." Ouch. It's a line McCain has been using at his rallies all week—but this isn't exactly an anti-Bush crowd. Many of these folks have been pushing hard for that coronation. "He really needs to be careful about that," one reporter whispers with concern. There is polite applause, but the audience is clearly uncomfortable. Undeterred, McCain continues with his standard stump speech, leaving in all the anti-Bush jabs. He tweaks W.'s tax policies, his negative campaign tactics ("If he can't compete in the arena of ideas, he's not ready for the job!"), and his support for the corrupt campaign finance system, in which the members of this audience are expert practitioners. A scowling, gray-haired woman at the table in front of me sits on her hands for the entire speech. She is not the only one.

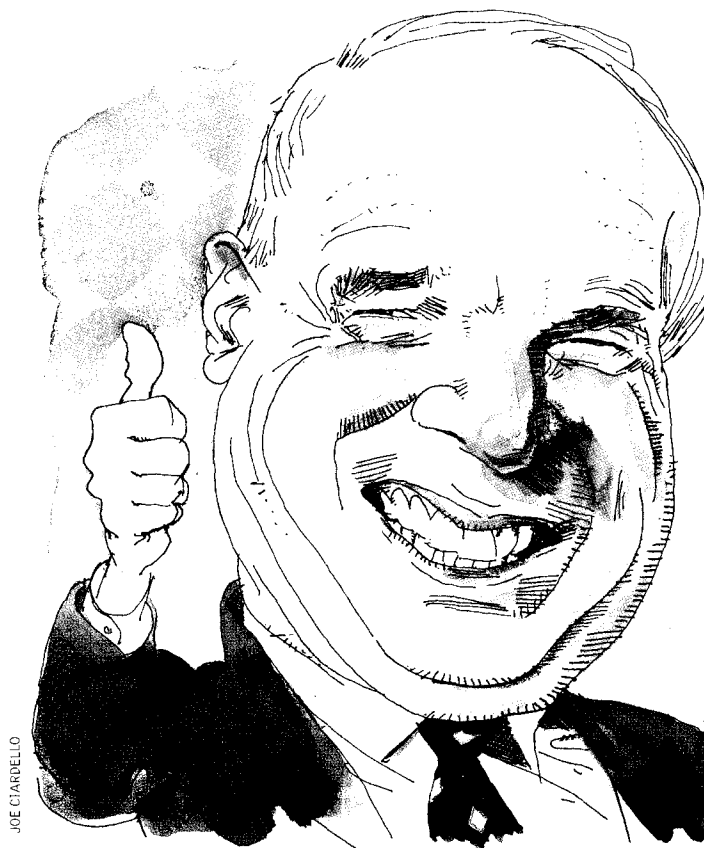
McCain seems to genuinely enjoy tweaking his fellow Republicans. And his supporters echo his "what, me worry?" attitude. "What are they going to do that they aren't already doing?" asks adviser Ken Khachigian, a veteran player in the California GOP. If their candidate amasses enough support from rank-and-file Republicans (and independents and Democrats), the establishment will fall into line, reasons McCain's team. The party is desperate for a win, says Khachigian. "I don't think Republicans want to lose for the sake of expressing bitterness at McCain."

BUT IT'S NOT that simple. Khachigian admits that "if you give up your Republican message, you lose." McCain's advisers continually hark back to Reagan, the last anti-establishment Republican to steal Democratic votes. "I'm doing exactly what Ronald Reagan did in 1980," McCain tells voters. "I'm moving that base out." Yet Reagan won over conservative Democrats with conservative issues: cutting taxes, beefing up the military, slashing welfare. McCain is charming Democrats and independents (not to mention the "liberal media") because "reform" provides him with a rhetorical framework to evade clear issue positions altogether. On abortion, for instance, McCain blames both pro-life and pro-choice zealots for "turning a cause into a business" rather than working to make adoption easier and improve foster care. Groups on both sides lash out at him, says McCain, not because of where he stands on abortion but because he wants to take away their big-money grip on government. With "special interests" serving as the all-purpose bad guy, voters of all

stripes can embrace the senator's message. Everyone sees McCain as a crusader—but, depending on their druthers, they see him as a crusader against big tobacco or against gun control or against the decline of the military. Anything you don't like can be labeled a "special interest."

It's an ironic strategy for a straight talker. The press has long pilloried George W. for his vague, fuzzy policy positions. But it may in fact be the straight-shootin' McCain who offers the fewest specifics—particularly on domestic issues. McCain's straight talk often has more to do with style than substance. W.'s campaign churns out detailed position papers. McCain's almost never does, and so far the press hasn't thrashed him for it. Reporters even note sympathetically that he can't: he doesn't have the staff.

But the campaign trail may soon get bumpier. As McCain enjoys more success, he will also come under tougher scrutiny, even from the love-struck media. In a February 6 appearance on "This Week," McCain endured a brutal grilling by Sam Donaldson on everything from fetal-tissue research



to the Confederate flag to his own fund-raising practices. Although McCain got off a number of good lines, he was frequently tongue-tied to the point of incoherence. This is the kind of non-straight talk the self-styled maverick cannot afford. Moreover, if George W. can pull himself together and start engaging McCain on substantive issues (as opposed to, say, absurd charges that the senator abandoned veterans), McCain may find his political balancing act in serious jeopardy. But when I ask campaign manager Rick Davis whether he plans to enlist more help in putting out policy details, he shrugs nonchalantly and says, "No, I don't think we need to." He better hope not. ■

Can Lee Atwater's legacy save George W.?

Ghosts

By DAVID GRANN

COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

THE PHONE STARTLED Suzette Latsko. She had worked the night shift at the hotel and was at home napping when it rang. The woman on the other end said she was conducting a poll on the upcoming South Carolina primary and wanted to ask a few questions. Latsko, who is working toward a degree in political science at the College of Charleston, perked up. "Go ahead," she said.

At first, as Latsko tells the story, the questions were generic: How much attention had Latsko been paying to the GOP campaign? Did she agree with the way the country was being run? But then the questions changed. "Do you agree," the woman asked, her voice rising slightly, "with the part of [John McCain's] plan that increases taxes on contributions to colleges, charities, and churches by \$20 million? Do you know that McCain voted for the largest tax increase ever?"

Latsko, who had been following the campaign closely, said she didn't think that was true. The woman asked whether that was her answer and then forged on, the questions sounding more and

more like statements: "McCain's tax plan does not give significant tax cuts to average working families.... McCain was reprimanded for intervention between the federal government and Charles Keating during the S&L scandals.... McCain uses the planes of corporations that have business before the committee that he chairs."

Latsko started to write the questions down on a piece of paper. "I couldn't believe it," she says. "It was totally dishonest." When she asked the polling group's name, the woman said it was Voter Consumer Research, which works for Texas Governor George W. Bush.

The Bush campaign denies it is conducting "push polling,"

a technique designed to spread negative information about an opponent in the guise of voter research, and leveled a similar charge against McCain. But there is mounting evidence that, after Bush's 18-point defeat in New Hampshire, his campaign, or at least those who support it, are resorting to a scorched-earth policy in South Carolina. In Greenville, near the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, several people told me that an endless stream of anonymous callers had phoned the local radio station asking about McCain's womanizing and questioning his war record. "It's disgusting," says Terry Haskins, the speaker pro tem of the South Carolina House and a McCain supporter. "There were people on the radio saying, 'How can Terry Haskins support a man who gave secrets to the enemy?' I've seen dirty politics, but I've never seen a rumor campaign like this. It's a vile attempt to destroy a man's reputation just to win an election, and I know it's organized because none of these rumors existed until the day after New Hampshire."

When I visited Greenville's Bob Jones University, the ultra-fundamentalist college famous for banning interracial dating, I encountered the campaign firsthand. As I sat in the administration office under the mounted head of a deer, Bob Taylor, the school's dean, who had helped coordinate Bush's recent visit to the school and had Bush bumper stickers stacked on his desk, told me he was worried about McCain's second wife's family values, among other things. What do you mean? I asked. He leaned forward, his voice dropping several notches. She owns, he confided, "one of the biggest beer distributors" in the country, and he feared her family might have "friendships among organized crime." When I asked him for evidence, he leaned back in his chair and said, "I don't have any firsthand knowledge, but that's just the kind of thing that's out there."

SOUTH CAROLINA—where loyalty is an obsession, conservatism a given, and hierarchy a way of life—has long been the place where liberal-minded and anti-establishment candidates die. It started with Lee Atwater, the blues-playing good old boy who liked to quote, in his Southern drawl, the ancient Chinese philosopher Sun-Tzu: "Awl wawfare is based on deception."

Atwater invented, for a whole generation of politicians and consultants, the art of modern political warfare. First as an aide to Senator Strom Thurmond and later as a consultant to Governor Carroll Campbell, he identified what he called "symbolic platforms"—the flag, family values, taxes—and painted his opponents, regardless of their ideology, as ultraliberals, as outsiders and transgressors of the Southern way of life. He helped label one congressional candidate a foreign-born Jew and said a Democrat who had suffered shock therapy as a 16-year-old had been "hooked up to jumper cables." "I guarantee you I can get the negatives up on anyone," Atwater boasted.

In 1980, as state chair of Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign, he set out to make South Carolina, and himself, central to national politics. George Bush had upset Reagan in Iowa, which gave him, famously, the "big mo" he thought he could ride to the nomination. But, when Bush hit South Carolina, Atwater was ready. In one of his most infamous ploys,



he got South Carolinian Reid Buckley to tape radio ads calling Bush a liberal, which, because Reid sounded so much like his brother, William F., made voters think they were listening to the conservative icon. These attacks, Atwater later gloated, pounded the pro-choice preppie from Connecticut "into the dirt." Victory in South Carolina secured Reagan the nomination and Atwater his role as the GOP establishment's Southern kingmaker, an enfant terrible whom respectable candidates would enlist every few years to do the things that politicians speak of only in back rooms.

As Earl and Merle Black note in *The Vital South*, Atwater based his strategy on a deep understanding of his native state. He grasped that South Carolina, profoundly traditional and dominated by his well-organized machine, would support whichever conservative the national party establishment wanted. Thus, by strategically scheduling South Carolina's primary, he could construct a "firewall" against any insurgent that independent, reform-minded Iowa and New Hampshire threw up. "Lee obviously understood the South better than anybody in this room," said Jack Kemp's campaign manager, Ed Rollins, during a postelection meeting of the top advisers to all the 1988 campaigns, "and, by moving the South Carolina primary forward, he set a strategy that was almost impossible to beat."

IN 1988, GEORGE BUSH'S third-place finish in Iowa put Atwater's firewall strategy to the test. Using a combination of patronage and arm-twisting, he lined up nearly the entire state leadership for the vice president, parading out one endorsement after another. The national press thought the endless show of endorsements a tedious waste of time, but Atwater knew that, in a place as hierarchical as South Carolina, gaudy demonstrations of power still resonated. At the same time, Atwater repackaged Bush to appeal to Southern pieties. "I believe in Jesus Christ as my personal savior," Bush, a reserved Episcopalian, told fundamentalists in Greenville.

Atwater also argued, over and over, that the campaign must go negative. Finally, still trailing in the polls, Bush relented, branding Bob Dole—first in New Hampshire and then in South Carolina—as an out-of-touch senator who straddled on taxes. Bush won easily in South Carolina and three days later rode the momentum to a crushing Super Tuesday triumph. The Palmetto State had become what the establishment so desperately needed: a death trap for outsiders.

In the general election, Atwater took his South Carolina strategy national. "The strategic concept was developed way before we knew who the Democratic nominee was," he said later. After Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis won the nomination, Atwater's team combed his record and came up with a litany of code words—ACLU, furlough, liberal—that it repeated over and over. Atwater vowed to "strip the bark off the little bastard" and "make Willie Horton his running mate." Polls that in May had shown Bush trailing by as much as 22 points suddenly showed him streaking ahead.

After Bush won, the Atwater formula became GOP gospel. Exploiting white Southerners' resentment of Northern liberals and intrusive federal regulations, Atwater finished what

Richard Nixon began: the South's wholesale shift into a Republican stronghold. Even after he died suddenly of a brain tumor in 1991, Atwater's firewall remained intact. In 1996, when Pat Buchanan's peasant army rose up and defeated Dole in New Hampshire, South Carolina quickly routed them, rescuing the establishment's teetering choice. Afterward Buchanan snapped that Dole had been "basically hauled up to the finish line and tossed over" by Atwater's legendary machine.

NOW IT IS George W. Bush's turn. He has surrounded himself with Atwater protégés and cohorts, among them campaign manager Karl Rove, former Governor Campbell, regional director Warren Tompkins, and spokesman Tucker Eskew. As if on cue, the campaign has lined up scores of endorsements throughout the state, from the lieutenant governor all the way down to the county sheriffs.

Many came willingly, but, according to Haskins, Bush's surrogates occasionally strong-armed fence-sitters. Haskins says Bush supporters asked South Carolina politicians to sign a letter asking the Texas governor to run, telling them they were not committing themselves to an endorsement. But, when some of the signers later tried to endorse McCain, Bush supporters told them they couldn't renege. (Eskew replies that "McCain's people are always looking for excuses for why the governor is more popular.") Other allies have gone further. Last Saturday members of the National Right to Life Committee flew into South Carolina and pressured a local anti-abortion group not only to endorse Bush but to run radio ads attacking McCain, according to one member who resigned in protest.

Bush is following the traditional Atwater script. After losing in New Hampshire, he moved right. He rushed to Bob Jones University, the same place his father proclaimed his faith in Christ, and was introduced as someone who "deeply loves the Lord." He repeated the word "conservative" six times in a single minute. He has repeatedly called the Confederate flag a "local" issue and last month held an oyster roast at Boone Hall, a former slave plantation near Charleston. And he has started to saturate the state with ads portraying McCain as just another liberal. "On taxes," one intones, "McCain echoes Washington Democrats."

"You can cut it anyway you want," Bush explained at a recent news conference, "[but] I'm going to take it to him." On the stump he now compares McCain to Clinton and claims that in New Hampshire "he came at me from the left." "[Bush] is running a classic 1988 Atwater campaign in 2000," says Trey Walker, the former executive director of the state Republican Party and McCain's field director.

But, for the first time in nearly two decades, Atwater's formula may no longer apply. In the post-Clinton moment, when candor is the only acceptable guile, Bush's attacks play to type. His heavy-handed assault creates just the story line McCain wants: the establishment villain versus the courageous upstart. "I feel like Luke Skywalker trying to get out of the Death Star," McCain told roaring crowds in Florence.

After Bush dispatched a surrogate to attack McCain's

record on veterans' issues, a half-dozen war heroes, including several who had been in the so-called Hanoi Hilton with McCain, gathered outside Bush's Columbia headquarters in front of local-news cameras, calling for the governor to "apologize for the smear." Uncertain what to do, a woman came out and offered them coffee. But as Orson Swindle, who had shared a cell with McCain, tried to hand-deliver a letter, someone apparently locked the door. Then, as he walked away, a dozen or so boyish Bush staffers and volunteers poured out onto the street, surrounding the veterans. When Swindle demanded that Bush apologize, Eskew stepped in, confronting a man who holds 20 military awards for valor in combat, including two Purple Hearts. "I didn't interrupt you!" Eskew said. "I ask you not to interrupt me!" Later, as they watched the footage on the evening news, the McCain team celebrated. "If they want to attack us on veteran issues," one aide told me, "that's fine by us."

It's not just that McCain isn't Dukakis. The Atwater machine of 2000 isn't the Atwater machine of 1988. In 1998, for the first time in 16 years, the GOP lost the South Carolina governorship. Without its perks and power, roughly a third of the legislature and two popular congressmen broke ranks and endorsed McCain. "There was a time when many of us fought together," says longtime GOP official George Shissias of the state party Atwater helped build. "[But] now the fighting between us is constant. I'm a Bush supporter, but there's a lot of us who wouldn't even walk into Bush headquarters because we hate the people working there so much."

AND IT'S NOT just the party leadership that's changing; South Carolina voters are as well. Once a backwater, the state is now filled with foreign businesses, high-tech companies, and plush retirement communities. Bob Jones's Taylor told me that, with more outsiders coming into the state, "the old coalition" may be eroding. And the newcomers seem less sympathetic to Atwater's favorite wedge issues: according to a recent poll, for instance, 39 percent of white South Carolinians want the Confederate flag that flies above the state house to be taken down. Many of the people leading the anti-flag effort are Republicans who've decided a good business climate trumps a symbol of heritage. Moreover, as in New Hampshire, Democrats and independents can cross over and vote in South Carolina's GOP primary. At one McCain rally last week, several Democrats, including the party's county chairwoman and a former state representative, turned up unexpectedly. Polls now show McCain and Bush in a statistical tie. "Something is happening out there," says Lee Bandy, who has covered state politics for decades.

As the tensions mount, the Bush campaign has become more and more like its candidate: hierarchical, fearful of a false move, almost paranoid. When I first called Bush headquarters last week, the spokesman said there wouldn't be any public events I could attend that weekend. Won't you be doing anything I can see? I asked incredulously. We'll be doing things in the office, Eskew said, but we're not going to let you just walk in and watch, "though I know you'd like that." Later, when I got permission to watch phone banking at the Greenville office, two aides told me, "Don't quote me. Only

the spokesman can be quoted." I asked for a copy of the script the volunteers were reading to strangers over the phone, but they said I needed to get it from the Columbia office. "That's just the way we operate," one of the aides explained.

By contrast, when I dropped in uninvited on McCain headquarters, staff members were almost comically nonchalant, encouraging me to wander the room with my tape recorder. "What are you, fuckin' high?" Walker said into the phone as I stood beside him. At one point a TV cameraman showed up and started panning the room, where internal documents were scattered on the desks and unshaven volunteers sipped beers. That night the volunteers—two Republicans, two Democrats, and an independent—invited me to dinner. "You can quote us," they told me, "but remember we're all just grunts."

I COULD SEE the firewall from the road: an endless stretch of redbrick houses on the edge of a man-made lake. Each house had almost the same black shutters and door. They were set on a hill, so you had to crane your neck to see the people trimming their hedges in the afternoon sun. My taxi driver, who appeared to be the only black man in the neighborhood, finally pulled up at our destination: a two-story house with a pile of signs that read BUSH COUNTRY.

After several requests, the campaign had finally agreed to let me watch it canvass a stronghold. Several Bush volunteers were already standing outside, holding placards and signs. A few of them peeled off BUSH 2000 bumper stickers and put them on the backs of their children's jackets. "We're gonna prove to you this is still Bush country," one of the campaign workers told me.

After a while, we broke into small groups, and I headed down the street with a 35-year-old salesman named Ben Gause, his wife, and two of their children, who trailed behind in a wheelbarrow covered with Bush stickers. "I hope we don't look like Jehovah's Witnesses," Gause joked as we approached the first house. A man was standing in his garage, fixing a custom-built motorcycle. As Gause began to speak, the man cut him off. "You can save it," he said, staring at our paraphernalia. "I'm already a Bush man. I'd vote for Nixon before I'd vote for that fella McCain." When I asked why, he said a friend, who was a state representative, had raised several concerns about McCain. "His temperament scares the daylights out of me," he said.

Gause seemed pleased as we bounded across the street. But by the second house it was clear something was wrong. A man working on his bushes said he was undecided. "I want to see Bush pull out a little more," he said obliquely. At the next house a middle-aged man said, "I'm leaning toward McCain. I'd been 100 percent for Bush, but he's stumbling." Finally we hit two Bush houses in a row—"That's better," said Gause—but then we encountered a deluge of undecideds and McCain supporters. Growing agitated, Gause tried to edge one woman over. "I'm a little worried about McCain's temperament," Gause said. She looked at him coolly. Sometimes, she said, you need someone who will "give the establishment hell."

"I can't believe this," said Gause as he headed home. "This is totally crazy. This is Bush country." ■

Stanley Kauffmann on Films Dying Early?

A FEW WEEKS ago in these pages David Thomson reviewed a new biography of John Ford. Thomson, always stimulating, wrote a final paragraph that was especially charged with experience and thought. In it he asked:

Can young people today read the poetry in *The Searchers* through the thickets of convention (and through Natalie Wood's eye makeup)? Do they want to know, or has the language of the Western been shot to pieces for them? I would not bet that John Ford or any of his peers—Hawks, Lubitsch, Sturges, Capra—are going to last beyond their century. Movies flash bright and die early. They are hard to preserve, and harder to watch once the mood of their time has gone.

This paragraph bristles with ideas that invite comment. Are films harder to watch in a later era than the one in which they were made, harder to appreciate than other arts in the same time straits? Is the work of dead white males—insofar as the term fits—more distanced in film than in other arts? Certainly time puts any work in a different context. In film courses that I have taught, grand pronouncements about honor and patriotism by screen characters often evoked snickers and groans from the class. But this disjuncture in time isn't limited to film. In a theater seminar where I was discussing *Measure for Measure* with a graduate group, one young woman burst into whooping laughter when Isabella asks her brother to give his life in order to preserve her virginity. (And told us what her brother would say.)

Art critics, E.H. Gombrich among them, have long told us that we can never look at a work with the eyes of the artist's contemporaries. Not to aggrandize Ford or the other directors mentioned above, why should their films be condemned by the flow of years any more than the work of other sorts of important artists? Let time winnow out chaff. Who today reads Martin Tupper, the Victorian versifier who rivaled Dickens in popularity?

Who listens to Paisiello's *Barber of Seville* instead of Rossini's? But those very questions imply that some work does endure. Why not the best of films?

Admittedly, films are intrinsically different, and this means that, in some part at least, Thomson is right. Films, even good ones, can suffer from age more than other arts because film is more immediate, more swiftly enveloping, than any other art except music (which itself often aids films); and that immediacy is frequently based on contemporary bonds with the audience, bonds both explicit and buried. As time goes on, references to defunct subjects obviously become dim, but more disturbing is the arrival of what Thomson calls "cultural misunderstanding." Terms of friendship or love become ungainly, as do choices of occupations and principles, belief in the very story of a film. (What director today would make *Lady for a Day*, in which an impoverished old woman gets one day of riches? Or *Sullivan's Travels*, in which a Hollywood director travels around the country penniless in order to learn about life?) So many of the links that once created immediacy are broken.

Thus the Ford Western, even at its best, may be vulnerable, less because of the genre itself than because of its moribund social and artistic acceptances. Ford's view of Indians is the outstanding social instance. Artistic instances abound: showing *Wagon Master*, much of it marvelous, I used to warn classes in advance about Joanne Dru's hairdo, which was always perfect no matter how rough the trek, so that they wouldn't have to waste time in scoffing. (See Thomson on Natalie Wood's eye makeup.) But Ford's power shoulders its way through all his gaffes. Besides, more genres than Westerns show wear and tear. Some screwball comedy classics, so called, are unbearable today. To see *Bringing Up Baby* today is to choke on its archaic archness, despite Grant and Hepburn. And musicals! When I watch Fred Astaire films on TV, which I do as often as possible, I press the Mute button between musical numbers. (How sharply Astaire's films distinguish between the mortal and the immortal.)

If "movies flash bright and die early," we can probably, for the most part, be glad of it. I just wish that more of them would at least flash bright. Peter Brook is said to have said of his theater work, "I thank God every night that the theater is ephemeral." Film is less so. But obviously Thomson was thinking not of arrant trash but of notable work when he bet on film's "century" of life and the gap between that work and new generations. Many, myself included, have tried to understand that gap, unthinkable thirty years ago. It is still truly unexplained, but Thomson has helped by connecting the breach with the fact that many films are frozen in now-discarded beliefs. Perhaps, too, the young generations of the past century were spoiled because they lived in times when geniuses kept appearing, here and abroad, in a dazzling cascade. The fate of film in the future may depend on that old romantic hope, the arrival of genius.

The future of past film, assuming that the physical objects themselves are preserved, seems to me not much more settled than the future of any art. Good films tend to be more overpraised than other good art work because films are so powerful so quickly, but time usually punctures inflated praise. If that is so, then why shouldn't the best endure? It is hard to imagine a future when there will be no response, for instance, to Chaplin's *I.A.M.* and his combat with the folding bed; or Keaton's *The Cameraman* and his swift glide through New York to his girl's house; or Henry Fonda looking down the road at the start of *The Grapes of Wrath*; or *The Straight Story*, with Richard Farnsworth's last line. The only thing that might kill superior work in the future would be either the immense degradation of the human spirit or its immense improvement.

The Ice Rink (Interama), a French comedy, certainly flashes bright and will certainly die early, but, since it was made precisely for those reasons, it tickles. The writer-director Jean-Philippe Toussaint had a well-worn idea, a satire about filmmaking, but he put it all in a new place that renders his picture fresh and funny. The film they are making within this film is about ice hockey; and all the shooting takes place on a large ice rink. (As, apparently, did Toussaint's shooting of the shooting.) The cameras that we see are on sleds, the director and crew that we see are on skates, with which none of them is very skilled. There are more juxtapositions: the male star is American; the female star, French, is the director's for-

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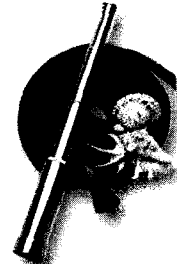
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mer girlfriend; and the hockey team that the inner film's producer has brought in is Lithuanian—so the inner director needs a translator, who is a blonde on skates. Additionally, the manager of the rink is a former skating star more interested in tales of his past glory than in aiding the production.

My favorite moment occurs when the director is injured in a skidding accident on the ice. An ambulance drives up to the front door of the rink, the two stretcher bearers rush into the building and down the grandstand steps, run out on the ice, and themselves begin the wild dance of

imbalance.

For a film like this, the term to avoid is "metaphor." Let's just say that the idea of lifting the whole process of filmmaking and setting it down on a slippery surface was a wickedly apt idea. Among the actors, Jean-Pierre Cassel, the best light comedian of the 1960s New Wave, plays the rink manager and is no less charming with gray hair; Marie-France Pisier, another veteran, manages to be sexy even as a film producer; and the leading lady of the film-in-process is played by Dolores Chaplin, whose grandfather, Charles, once made a film called *The Rink*. ■

Robert Brustein on Theater Ascents and Dissents

DAVID HIRSON'S FIRST play on Broadway, *La Bête*, in 1991, triggered a fusillade of negative reviews, despite the participation of an imaginative director (Richard Jones) and a courageous producer (Stuart Ostrow). A Yale-trained scholar writing in scrupulous imitation of Molière, Hirson not only composed a period piece worthy of seventeenth-century French comedy, he also wrote the play in rhyming couplets. And he was chutzpadik enough to fulminate, Alceste-like, against the vulgarization of culture and the debasement of taste—and to the patrons of the Great White Way, no less! On Broadway, this was tantamount to a temperance zealot urging abstinence and sobriety on the denizens of a Third Avenue tavern. Predictably, this unwanted interloper was roughed up by the local barflies, who, ignoring the prizes his play had garnered abroad, booted his ass into the street before returning to inspect the labels on their preferred bottles of booze.

Nine years later—Hirson is not exactly prolific—he has picked himself off the sidewalk, dusted the street from his clothes, and staggered back into the barroom with another temperance lecture called *Wrong Mountain* (Eugene O'Neill Theatre). Once again, the local toughs have done their job on him, pummeling the playwright and closing his play in just over two weeks (two weeks less than *La Bête* lasted in the same theatre). It would

seem, as far as criticism is concerned, that history is repeating itself, but so, unfortunately, is Hirson. I strongly believe that *Wrong Mountain* deserves more respect and a longer life than it managed to receive. After all, how many new American plays are allowed to slouch their way toward Broadway these days, especially those engaging serious intellectual issues? But it must be admitted that, despite its estimable intentions, *Wrong Mountain* ends up looking like a contemporary reworking of *La Bête* without its wit, its color, or its charm.

Hirson's current hero is the poet Henry Dennett—a bilious Jeremiah in the style of Allan Bloom—who, while fighting a monster tapeworm in his gut, has been angrily witnessing the death of literature from a surfeit of bad taste and inane ideas. His antagonist is Guy Halperin, a "tremendously successful" writer of Broadway musicals now living with Dennett's ex-wife. Although Halperin concedes that real talent often toils in obscurity, he also believes that the purpose of art is not really to trouble the mind with questions of beauty and truth. It is, rather, to find the materials that will be more inclusive of women, teenagers, and people of color. In short, Hirson is recapitulating the familiar, unresolved debate about art in a democratic society.

Although the characters and circumstances may be somewhat different, the argument also recapitulates the conflict in *La Bête* between the poet Elomire and

the poetaster Valère. Dennett, like Elomire, believes that one achieves popularity only by bartering one's soul. Quoting (at least three times) from Strindberg's introduction to *Miss Julie*, he calls conventional theatre a "*Biblia Pauperum*," a bible in pictures for the benefit of the lazy and the illiterate, written "to sustain the interest of an easily bored mind that is always threatening to revolt." Guy, like Valère, believes that writing hit musicals is just as difficult as producing good poems. Warning Dennett that he may have spent his entire life "climbing the wrong mountain," Guy challenges him to ascend a new peak by writing a successful play.

Despite his disdain for middlebrow taste, "that mountain of toxic kitsch," Dennett accepts the challenge, probably because he stands to win \$100,000 from Guy if he succeeds. In the next scene, after a miniature train has transported us between two peaks to the accompaniment of Grieg's "Hall of the Mountain Kingdom," we are deposited in the "Lila W. Hirschhorn Rehearsal Pavilion," the site of a Sundance-like play contest located somewhere in the Rockies. There we find Dennett competing with two younger playwrights for the grand prize.

It is in this rehearsal studio that Hirson starts to climb the wrong mountain, clouding his original premise with a feeble satire on a theatrical troupe (an idea also borrowed from *La Bête*). This one is in the throes of rehearsing not only the competing plays but a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Hirson's overwrought histrios, especially the plummy, henna-haired festival director, Michael Montresor, spring more from the imagination of Charles Dickens than from anything recognizable in our own time. Played as a flaming if absentminded pouf by the gifted Daniel Davis, Montresor looks less like a contemporary member of Actors Equity than like some addled old laddie from the Garrick Club, continually referring to, and misquoting, "the Bard" while hamming up roles he has long outgrown.

When he is not rehearsing *Romeo*, the aging Montresor is busy leading his company in group hugs and animal exercises. Captivated by celebrity and boastful of his friendship with "Kiki" (Laurence Olivier), whose wig he once combed, he is full of admiration for Dennett, though he can't seem to remember his name correctly. As for Dennett, he seizes the opportunity to restate his elitist views ("find out what slop the livestock wants and treat curtain up as feeding time") when he engages in debate with a competing playwright who finds him incredibly twisted and condescending.

Despite his increasingly tiresome screeds against mediocrity, Dennett

grows surprisingly benevolent as his festival experience draws to an end. This is partly because his play has won the first prize, and partly because he has drunk some transfiguring waters from the fountain of the goddess Lithea, who may personify Success. He admits to having been softened by the nature of the actors. He is impressed by "the amazingly beautiful scepter" that he has won for his play, which is also entitled *Wrong Mountain*. Does this Pirandellian conceit suggest that Hirson is enmeshed in a secret autobiography?

Only Dennett's son, a sour disciple of a surly guru, dissents from the generally high estimate of his father's play, which he calls "an embarrassing piece of kitsch" articulated through "the voice of a pornographer." Reminding his father of his own belief that success is the ultimate betrayal, he confronts him with the discarded mirror image of what he once was. As for Dennett, he has become indistinguishable from Guy. His play, which he describes as "the rare drama that is courageous enough to examine where we are and where we have to go," is headed for Broadway. When it gets there, Dennett's *Wrong Mountain* will no doubt suffer the same fate as Hirson's *Wrong Mountain*: death from an avalanche of critical scorn.

Ron Rifkin plays Henry Dennett with a corrosive, lacerating hatred that sometimes turns on itself, maintaining consistency of character even when the playwright abandons it. And Tom Riis Farrell as Dennett's doctor has a few very funny moments enjoying his patient's physical distress. In his second attempt at a Hirson work, Richard Jones shows some of the frustration that results when an essentially visual director tries to stage an essentially verbal play. The pace is too fast and most of the scenic effects seem superfluous. What was Hirson's reason for writing *Wrong Mountain*? To satirize bad theater—or to chastise himself for his own involvement in it? For that answer, we must await the playwright's next temperance lecture.

Claudia Shear's *Dirty Blonde* at the New York Theatre Workshop has a lot of charm, but it seems more like an act of heroine worship than an as yet fully realized work. Written in coordination with

Orion

Stars rising like something said. Something never
To be forgotten, shining forever—look
How still they are.

Blind hunter crawling
Toward sunrise, then healed.

He opened his eyes to find her waiting
—Afraid—and together they traveled lightly.
Requiring nothing

But a sense that the ground beneath them stretched
Forever. Look. At the edge

He entered the water, became a speck. His body
Washed ashore, then raised—

The belt, the worn-out sword. I'm not
Afraid.

Except that there is nothing beneath us,
No ground without fear. The body vulnerable

—You can look at me—

The body still now, never
Changing, rising forever, like something said.

James Longenbach

its director, James Lapine, the work is an effort to pay tribute to Mae West—particularly her boldness in challenging the sexual taboos of the stage and screen. The adjective "dirty" in the title describes both the color of her pre-peroxide hair and the character of her post-pubescent mouth.

Played within a perspective box designed by Douglas Stein, which initially features a glimpse of Mae's seductive eyes, *Dirty Blonde* is performed by a cast of three, including the author, all of them in a variety of roles. Shear, for example, enacts both the part of Mae West and one of her latter-day admirers, while Kevin Chamberlain plays one of her vaudeville partners and Charlie, a young man whom West once asked to impersonate her for the sake of tourists passing by her Beverly Hills home. (The proud owner of the dress she gave him for the purpose, Charlie soon gets in the habit of wearing it in private.)

Shear also has a chance to try on a Mae West dress, in the character of a young woman named Jo whom Charlie takes to a Halloween party. To advance their budding romance, Charlie must persuade Jo that his own love of drag does not necessarily mean that he is gay. It could simply mean that he is overcome with admiration for a great female personality. These psy-

chological revelations are not the strongest things in the evening.

Still, the performers make *Dirty Blonde* quite winsome, even when the writing remains somewhat cursory and impressionistic. And the show benefits from some lively period music played on piano by Bob Stillman (who also enacts Mae's first husband and her gravel-voiced Beverly Hills assistant). Stillman is also the composer of the catchy title song, nicely sung and nimbly danced by the other two performers.

The playwright is always threatening to obscure her engaging factual material with her not-very-interesting fictional subplot. Too often *Dirty Blonde* falls into the pattern of an "unforgettable character" sketch or, at best, an entertaining biopic. It is pleasant to be reminded of Mae West's journey from vaudeville, where she earned a bad name for her "ribaldry," to Broadway shows such as *Sex*, where her risqué double entendres got her arrested for public indecency, to her long career in Hollywood where she discovered

Cary Grant (featuring him in *She Done Him Wrong*), after which she quarreled with W.C. Fields during the making of *My Little Chickadee*, and then committed the monumental mistake of turning down *Sunset Boulevard* because she wouldn't play a has-been. The evening manages to shovel in most of West's legendary one-liners ("Me, I feel like a million—one at a time, one at a time"), though it curiously omits the best of them: "Is that a ten-gallon hat on your lap or are you just glad to see me?"

Shear effectively distinguishes between her own expert job as an actress playing Mae West and her character Jo's clumsy impersonation of the woman. Gradually building a legend out of the sequined gowns and peroxide wigs, she skillfully captures the working-class dockside accent, the suggestive glinting stare, the insinuating parted lips, the left hip that gyrates like an idling engine with bad cylinder heads. Shear never exaggerates a personality that is already something of an exaggeration. But the main problem with her play is Platonic—she gives us an imitation of an imitation. Mae West being something of a female impersonator herself, any theatrical representation of her removes us two degrees from reality. ■

With Dirge in Marriage

By STEPHEN GREENBLATT

Gertrude and Claudius by John Updike

(Alfred A. Knopf, 208 pp., \$23)

I.

SHAKESPEARE IS THE supreme poet of courtship. One has only to think of the aging sonneteer and the fair young man, of panting Venus and reluctant Adonis, of Orlando and Rosalind, and Romeo and Juliet, and Petruchio and Kate, even of twisted, perverse Richard III and Lady Anne. And he is a great poet of the family, with a special interest in complex father-daughter relations: Egeus and Hermia, Brabantio and Desdemona, Lear and the fearsome threesome, Pericles and Marina, Prospero and Miranda. And yet, though wedlock is the promised land toward which his comic heroes and heroines drive, and though family fission is the obsessive theme of the tragedies, Shakespeare is curiously restrained in his depictions of what it is actually like to be married.

This is not surprising, perhaps, for a playwright who married at eighteen and then spent most of his adult life in London, at a considerable (and safe?) distance from provincial Stratford-on-Avon, where his wife Anne, eight years his senior, and his three children continued to reside. He may not have known very well from the inside what a long-term love felt like. Still, this cannot be the whole explanation, since Shakespeare, for all we know, may have been steadily living with someone else in London, and he did, after all, have his own parents' marriage to observe at close range. In any case, he was famously good at imagining what he could not possibly have experienced first-hand (whence the persistent attempts, despite the overwhelming counterevidence, to invent someone else, better-born and better-educated, as the author of the plays and the poems). So why shouldn't Shakespeare have given us more sustained representations of married couples?

To be sure, he provides some fascinat-

ing glimpses, mostly of couples in varying states of estrangement: Antipholus and Adriana (from *The Comedy of Errors*), Hotspur and Kate, Brutus and Portia, Coriolanus and Virgilia, and, most disastrous of all, Leontes and Hermione. Mostly, we are given wives feeling neglected or shut out:

Adriana: His company must do his
minions grace,
Whilst I at home starve for a merry look.

Kate Percy: For what offence have I
this fortnight been
A banish'd woman from my Harry's bed?

Portia: Am I yourself
But, as it were, in sort or limitation,
To keep with you at meals, comfort
your bed,
And talk to you sometimes? Dwell I
but in the suburbs
Of your good pleasure? If it be no more,
Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife.

Occasionally, as in *The Winter's Tale*, we catch sight of something more than a frustrated craving for intimacy. Hermione manages to tease her husband playfully, and in her teasing we sense marital emotions that go beyond anxious dependence. Yet it is precisely at this moment of slightly edgy mutuality that Leontes is seized by a paranoid fear of his wife's infidelity. So, too, in *Othello*, Desdemona's full, bold presence in the marriage—

That I did love the Moor to live with him,
My downright violence and storm of
fortunes
May trumpet to the world—

seems to be the trigger of her husband's homicidal jealousy. This particular marriage lasts something like a day and a half before it falls apart.

At least those are all couples. Many of the significant married pairs in Shakespeare have been divorced by death long before the play begins. For the most part, it is the women who have vanished: no Mrs. Bolingbroke, Mrs. Shylock, Mrs. Leonato,

Mrs. Brabantio, Mrs. Lear, Mrs. Prospero. Very infrequently, we get a memory-trace: Shylock's wife was named Leah, and she gave her husband a turquoise ring that their daughter Jessica heartlessly traded for a monkey. Even less frequently, we get a tiny hint of what has taken these missing spouses from the world: "But she, being mortal, of that boy did die." For the most part, however, Shakespeare doesn't bother to explain.

It will not do to tell oneself that mortality rates were so high in Elizabethan England that mothers were simply expected to disappear. Demographers have shown that the risks of childbirth were high, but not nearly high enough to explain their wholesale absence from the plays. Clearly, Shakespeare does not want a *Taming of the Shrew* in which Mrs. Minola will have her own ideas on her daughters' suitors, or a *King Lear* in which the old king's wife will dispute his plans for retirement. Clearly, too, his imagination does not easily conjure up a happy heterosexual couple. The ending of *As You Like It* succeeds only because we are not invited to contemplate the future home life of Rosalind and Orlando, or of the rest of the "country copulatives," as Touchstone calls them. *Twelfth Night* relieves us of the burden of seeing Viola dressed as a demure young woman; Orsino is betrothed to his effeminate boyfriend. It is positively depressing to think about the future of Claudio and Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and the jury is still out on the likely longevity of Beatrice and Benedick's happiness.

IN ENGLISH LITERATURE it is not until *Paradise Lost*, first published in 1667 and then recast in 1674, that we find a sustained and convincing portrayal of a marriage, and a rather special one at that: the mother of all marriages, that of "our first parents." As befits a literally paradisaical couple, "the loveliest pair/ That ever since in love's embraces met," their relationship is a happy one. They garden together, but only long enough to make the cool breeze feel welcome and to enhance their healthy appetites for edenic fruits. And their appetites extend beyond food and drink: Milton insists again and again that the relationship between Adam and Eve is joyous, passionate, and physical. Its pleasures are overwhelming enough to unsettle the hierarchical sense of superiority that Adam knows he is supposed to have over Eve. "When I approach/ Her loveliness," he confesses to the visiting angel, "so absolute she seems" that he looks on her in awe. Even after the angel rebukes him, Adam, only "half-abashed," asks the angel how heavenly spirits express their

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love: by looks only, or by "immediate touch"? The angel blushing smiles and, assuring Adam that it is even better in heaven, quickly announces that it is time to fly.

It is out of these feelings of intense mutual love that Milton weaves his startlingly brilliant depiction of the first—and, it turns out, fatal—marital argument, a depiction that discloses how completely the tangle of misunderstanding, pain, and exasperation is bound up with the couple's long-term life together, their shared emotional register, their particular intimacy. "Offspring of Heav'n and earth, and all earth's lord," Eve addresses Adam, after he has expressed reservations about her suggestion that they garden for a few hours apart,

That such an enemy we have,
who seeks
Our ruin, both by thee informed I learn,
And from the parting angel overheard
As in a shady nook I stood behind,
Just then returned at shut of evening
flow'rs.
But that thou shouldst my firmness
therefore doubt
To God or thee, because we have a foe
May tempt it, I expected not to hear.

That Milton should have been the artist to capture this intimate tone of hurt feelings is probably owed not only to his famously unhappy personal experience, but also to the increasing emphasis among Puritans on companionate marriage. Marriage was no longer the consolation prize for those who did not have the higher vocation of celibacy; it was not the doctrinally approved way of avoiding the sin of fornication; it was not even principally the means of generating offspring and conveying property. It was about love.

IT IS NO accident that Milton wrote the great tracts on the legitimacy of divorce: the dream of emotional fulfillment in marriage depends heavily upon the possibility of divorce. Otherwise, it is better to make jokes about endurance, pass over most marriages in discreet silence, and write love poetry to anyone but your spouse. Dante did not wax mystical about Gemma, and no one, as far as I know, thinks that Shakespeare wrote the Dark Lady sonnets to Anne Hathaway. The greatest lovers in Shakespeare are Antony and Cleopatra, the very essence of what it means *not* to be married.

In Shakespeare's wide-ranging explorations of human experience, then, we come back to the relative thinness, with one significant exception, of his representation

of marriage. The exception, of course, is the Macbeths, Shakespeare's richest account of spousal intimacy. Years ago Mary McCarthy amusingly described the thane and his lady as the first suburban couple. "Dearest chuck," Macbeth affectionately calls his wife, as he withholds from her an account of what he has been doing at the office—as it happens, arranging the murder of his friend Banquo—so that she can better applaud the deed when it is done. When they host the dinner party from hell, the loyal wife tries to cover for her husband: "Sit, worthy friends," she tells the guests, understandably startled when Macbeth starts screaming at the apparition, which he alone sees, of the murdered Banquo sitting in his chair,

my lord is often thus,
And hath been from his youth:
pray you, keep seat;
The fit is momentary;
upon a thought
He will again be well.

Then, under her breath, she tries to make him get a grip on himself: "Are you a man?"

The sexual taunt half-hidden in these words is the crucial note that Lady Macbeth strikes again and again. It is the principal means by which she gets her

wavering husband to kill the king:

When you durst do it, then you were
a man;
And, to be more than what you were,
you would
Be so much more the man.

If these taunts work on Macbeth, it is not because husband and wife have committed themselves to conventional suburban gender roles; at this point Mary McCarthy's little joke sounds silly. For the pair meet on the ground of a shared, willed, murderous ferocity:

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that
milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless
gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn
as you
Have done to this.

And Macbeth is weirdly aroused by this fantasy:

Bring forth men-children only;
For thy undaunted mettle should
compose
Nothing but males.

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The exchange has taken us deep inside this particular marriage. Whatever has led Lady Macbeth to imagine the bloody scene that she describes, and whatever Macbeth feels in response to her fantasy—terror, sexual excitement, envy, soul-sickness, companionship in evil—lies at the heart of what it means to be the Macbeths.

What is startling about this scene, and about the whole relationship between Macbeth and his wife, is the extent to which they inhabit each other's minds. When we first see Lady Macbeth, she is reading a letter from her husband, describing his encounter with the witches who have prophesied that he would be king: "This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee." He cannot wait until he gets home to tell her; he needs her to share the fantasy with him at once.

And she, for her part, not only plunges into it immediately, but also begins almost in the same breath to reflect with studied insight upon her husband's nature:

It is too full o' the milk
of human kindness
To catch the nearest way:
thou wouldst be great;
Art not without ambi-
tion, but without
The illness should attend
it: what thou wouldst
highly,
That wouldst thou holily;
wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly
win: thou'ldst have,
great Glamis,
That which cries "Thus thou must do,
if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear
to do
Than wishest should be undone."

The richness of this account, the way it opens up from the first simple observation to something almost queasily complicated, is vivid evidence of the wife's ability to follow the twists and turns of her husband's innermost character, to take her spouse in. And her intimate understanding leads her to desire to enter into him:

"Hie thee hither,/That I may pour my spirits in thine ear."

II.

NOW THE INDEFATIGABLE, myriad-minded John Updike has cunningly taken note of another married couple in Shakespeare: Hamlet's mother Gertrude and the man whom she marries soon after the sudden death of her husband, the king Hamlet. That man is the king's younger brother, Claudius. This wedded pair is far more shadowy than

lover to kill her husband? If not, did she at least suspect that he might do so? And, after her husband's death—which was reported as an accident—did she ever doubt that a serpent in the orchard stung him? What did she know and when did she know it? And now—the now of the play, which opens when she has married her brother-in-law, who has assumed the Danish throne—how well does Gertrude know Claudius?

The play teases us with many possible answers, all of which it withholds. When Polonius is nattering on to Ophelia about hypocrisy, we

suddenly see Claudius wince—"How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!"—but the words are whispered to no one but himself. Later Claudius allows us, for a remarkable moment, a rich glimpse of his tangled inner life, but it is not to Gertrude that he opens himself: he is alone, on his knees, trying to pray. There is no sign that this couple has the criminal intimacy of the Macbeths. Still, there are indications, fragmentary but striking, of closeness.

This is not much in evidence when we see them together in the first court scene. There Claudius, formally reviewing the recent events, speaks with a carefully poised frankness about the recent marriage, deftly raising and thus asserting spin-control over extremely delicate questions of political ambition and incest:

Therefore our sometime
sister, now our queen,
The imperial jointress to

this warlike state
Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,—
With an auspicious and a dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral and with dirge
in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and
dole,—
Taken to wife.

There is nothing here to suggest more than the formality of a convenient alliance, but the anxiety aroused by their extremely difficult son seems to bring them closer together. "Sweet Gertrude, leave us," Claudius addresses his wife, when he is setting about to spy on Hamlet,



John Updike by Vint Lawrence for The New Republic

the Macbeths, less developed by the playwright as a couple, and less clearly intimate with one another. Indeed, if the core of the Macbeths is a secret partnership—an intimacy soaked in blood and, ultimately, a profound, entirely mutual despair—then the core of Gertrude and Claudius is an enigma, a set of trick mirrors.

Virtually all the questions center on Gertrude. Did she love her first husband? Did she have an affair with her brother-in-law? If so, did anyone else—her husband's chief councillor, Polonius, perhaps, or even her husband himself—have any inkling of it? Did she actively plot with her

and she happily complies, for they are clearly one in their concern. For her part, Gertrude ratifies Claudius's attempt to adopt Hamlet as his own son—"Hamlet, thou has thy father much offended," she chides him after "The Mousetrap"—and, more telling still, she heroically defends her husband, at the risk of her own life, when Laertes storms the palace.

Bent on avenging the murdered Polonius, Laertes is out for blood, and Shakespeare provides, as he often does at crucial moments, an indication within the text of how he wants the scene staged. Gertrude must throw herself between her husband and the would-be avenger; indeed, she must physically restrain the enraged Laertes, since Claudius twice says, "Let him go, Gertrude." To Laertes's demand, "Where's my father?" Claudius forthrightly answers, "Dead"; whereupon Gertrude immediately adds, "But not by him."

In a play heavily freighted with commentary, those four words have received strangely little attention. Gertrude is directing the murderous Laertes's rage away from her husband and toward someone else: Polonius's actual murderer, Prince Hamlet. To be sure, she is not directly contriving to have her beloved son killed. Claudius is probably not lying when he explains to Laertes that he cannot move against Hamlet directly because "the queen his mother/Lives almost by his looks." "And for myself," he adds, in a remarkable confession of love that seems no less true for being rhetorically calculated,

She's so conjunctive to my life and soul,
That, as the star moves not but in his
sphere,
I could not but by her.

WHAT IS THE basis of this extraordinary relationship, on which both Claudius and Gertrude stake their lives? It is not psychological or emotional intimacy at any sense dependent on a deep, mutual honesty. Not only does Claudius have his murderous secrets, but Gertrude, too, is not exactly forthcoming when, after the terrible encounter with her son in her bedroom, Claudius asks her, "How does Hamlet?" "Mad as the sea and wind, when both contend," she replies, but she does not add that he claims that he is perfectly sane, that he has accused them both of killing his father, and that he has urged her to stay out of Claudius's bed. We can be certain that Claudius would have found this information extremely interesting—though, to give him credit, he has already begun secretly plotting Hamlet's death.

What clearly binds Gertrude and Clau-

dius together—to the horror of Hamlet and the fascination of Updike—is intense sexual attraction. "You cannot call it love," declares the son, sickened by the very thought of his middle-aged mother's sexuality, "for at your age/The heyday in the blood is tame." But he knows that the heyday in Gertrude's blood is *not* tame, and his imagination dwells on the image of his mother and uncle

In the rank sweat of an enseamèd bed,
Stewed in corruption, honeying and
making love
Over the nasty sty.

The dirty-minded obsession with the greasy or semen-stained ("enseamèd") sheets calls up a hallucinatory vision of his father—or is it an actual haunting?—that provides a momentary distraction. Yet as soon as the ghost vanishes, the son is at it again, pleading with his mother to "refrain tonight." Again his sick imagination broods on the bed, as he conjures up an obscene scenario of domestic intimacy in which his amorous uncle coaxes from his mother his secret: that he is only feigning madness.

Let the bloat King tempt you gain to bed,
Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his
mouse,
And let him for a pair of reechy kisses,

Or paddling in your neck with his
damned fingers,
Make you to ravel all this matter out,
That I essentially am not in madness,
But mad in craft.

The extent to which Hamlet is ever actually in control of his "antic disposition" is always in question, but nowhere in the play does he seem more essentially in madness than here, fantasizing about those "reechy"—rancid—kisses.

III.

IN *GERTRUDE AND CLAUDIUS*, John Updike fantasizes about the same kisses:

The wine was thick and sweet, and under its influence, drinking first from opposite sides and then from the same of the heavy-stemmed cup, they could not help rubbing against each other, and fell to the bed, where, removing no clothes, they groped for sensitive flesh while exchanging reechy kisses, their mouths sour with wine, tainted with cheese, but for all that sweet, deeply so; it was as if two great angelic funnels were pouring through their joined lips the long-dammed contents of their souls, all the wounds in need of healing, all the comforts until now unbestowed.

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We reach this passage halfway through the novel, which is, apart from the last few pages, entirely set in the time before the events Shakespeare dramatizes. Gertrude is married to old Hamlet, but she has been heavily flirting with the king's younger brother, recently returned from wanderings in the far-off Mediterranean and Aegean, and at last, under the influence of the wine in the Byzantine chalice that he has brought to her from Thessaloniki, their desire for one another erupts. For readers who know Shakespeare's play well—and a surprising number of people have *Hamlet* almost by heart—one of the pleasures of Updike's novel lies in deft touches like that adjective "reechy." The effect is a bit like the clever in-jokes of *Shakespeare in Love*, but there is more at stake here than a sly wink.

Updike's novel is almost literally *Hamlet* without the prince. It is an attempt to pry us loose from the perspective that dominates Shakespeare's play, the perspective of the haunted son nauseated by the flesh, and specifically by the flesh of his mother and his uncle. To be sure, as we have just seen, the novel's adulterous lovers have the carnality—the unseemly rubbing and groping—that so disgusts Hamlet, but it is a carnality that heals, not imprisons, the soul. Somewhere beyond the edges of Updike's fictional world another, immeasurably more powerful fictional world will take over: one where the wine in the chalice will be poisoned by the sly Claudius, angling for Hamlet's life, and where Gertrude instead will fatally drink of it. The novel sees that end coming—there is no escaping the most famous tragic plot in world literature—but it asks us to hold the endgame at bay, or rather to reach back before the endgame has begun.

TO ASSIST THAT reaching back into the past—that is, into the life-world that precedes Shakespeare's account (and the prince's melancholy vision)—only the third and final part of Updike's novel uses the names of the characters familiar to us from the play. The first two parts instead use the names found in the two principal sources of the Hamlet story: the late-twelfth-century Danish chronicle written in Latin by Saxo Grammaticus, and the sixteenth-century *Histoires tragiques* by François de Belleforest.

The device serves to dissociate Horwendil, Feng, Gerutha, and Amleth from old Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, and prince Hamlet, but it probably helped Updike more than it can possibly help his readers. There is not enough of a payoff to justify having Horwendil turn without explanation into Hovendile and then, again with-

out explanation, into Hamlet. (For the purposes of this discussion, I will simply ignore the name changes, since they are likely to be confusing.) And, if one happens to know the sources, it is only a distraction, since Updike's story has virtually nothing to do with the underlying themes and values of the medieval account.

Saxo's narrative is closely related to the great Norse sagas of violence, cunning, and revenge. Feng is envious of his older brother's good fortune and resolves to slay him. The fratricide is not a secret act; Feng justifies it by claiming that Horwendil was a brute who had been abusing his gentle wife Gerutha. Young Amleth is too young and too weak to attempt the revenge that the social code demands. His task is to survive until he is capable of killing his uncle, but his uncle knows the social code perfectly well and can be expected to snuff out Amleth's life at the first sign of menace. Amleth's solution is to feign madness: "Every day," Saxo writes, "he remained in his mother's house utterly listless and unclean, flinging himself on the ground and bespattering his person with foul and filthy dirt." Though Feng is suspicious, the wily Amleth manages to elude the many traps set for him, and eventually to accomplish his great task: he burns Feng's followers to death and runs Feng himself through with his sword. "O valiant Amleth, and worthy of immortal fame," exclaims Saxo.

UPDIKE FOLLOWS SHAKESPEARE in changing the crucial element in this account. The fratricide is no longer an open, public deed that triggers the expectation of revenge. It is a dark secret known only to Polonius and to the murderer Claudius, who pours into the sleeping king's ear an exotic poison that he has brought back from Byzantium. Gertrude, in Updike's account, is kept entirely ignorant of the crime, and ignorant even of its precipitating event: old Hamlet's discovery that she is having an affair with his brother. The novel nicely fleshes out the play's account of the poisoning by providing a filmic close-up: "His was a tidy ear, square and white and plumply lobed, with a froth of gray hairs around the waxy hole." The poison does its job with admirable swiftness, and Claudius escapes unseen.

The perfect success of this scheme brings in its wake a narrative problem. How can the son possibly learn that his father's sudden death was a murder and not an accident? Shakespeare famously solves the problem by bringing on the ghost. Since the revenge is not part of Updike's story, he does not need the ghost at all; but he cannot resist introducing him, if only as part of the widowed Ger-

trude's psychology: "King Hamlet in Gertrude's sense of him became almost palpable, quickening all of her senses save that of sight, her ears imagining a rustle, a footstep, a stifled groan, the nerves and fine hairs of her sixth sense tickled and brushed by some passing emanation, though the corridor was windless, and no newly snuffed candle or fresh-lit fire could account for the whiff of burning, of smoke, of char, of roasting." We are spared the comparable gothic machinery for Prince Hamlet. Instead we are given a whiff of Freud and Ernest Jones, as Claudius speculates on the source of the young man's psychological troubles: "He blames himself, I believe, for his father's death," Claudius smoothly explained. "He feels he willed it, in desiring you."

From what we can see of him during his limited appearances, Updike's Hamlet is not likely to excite anyone's unequivocal admiration. We glimpse him as a child, always nagged at by some small complaint: "colic, a rash in his crotch, endless colds and croup, fevers with long lying abed." We glimpse him again at the end of the novel as a sour, immature, troubled young man recalled to Elsinore, against his wishes, by his absurdly (and, we happen to know, fatally) overconfident uncle: "I am certain I can make the Prince love me." Yet the center of *Gertrude and Claudius* is not the prince; it is his mother's adulterous affair.

Shakespeare's Hamlet has an overwhelmingly idealized vision of his parents' marriage. His father he remembers as

so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of
heaven
Visit her face too roughly.

And his mother, as he compulsively recalls, seemed like she could not get enough of her husband:

Must I remember? Why, she would hang
on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on.

These powerful fantasies of parental bliss—against which her mother's hasty remarriage stands out like a grotesque aberration—are only reinforced by the ghost's intensely self-admiring account:

O Hamlet, what a falling off was there!—
From me, whose love was of that dignity
That it went hand-in-hand even with
the vow
I made to her in marriage, and to decline
Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were
poor
To those of mine.

But virtue, as it never will be moved,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of
heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed
And prey on garbage.

Small wonder that Hamlet cannot comprehend how his mother could unite herself with a satyr when she had been married to Hyperion.

UPDIKE'S NOVEL PEELS away these fantasies. It is as if one discovered a cache of letters that reveal that one's parents' perfect marriage was, well, not a disaster but a profound disappointment. All the public manifestations of the royal couple were splendid, allowing the whole world to join in the child's dream of an ideal union, but the inner reality, at least for the wife, was anything but ideal. Clever, sensual, and independent, the young princess Gertrude, in Updike's account, did not want to marry the conventional, dull, unsubtle warrior Hamlet; the choice was her father's. On their wedding night, the groom, "in a coarse-knit, boxy nightcap," had fallen asleep before the marriage was consummated, and though the omission was repaired the next morning—so that the bloodied sheet could be displayed—the relationship never came to possess passion or emotional depth.

Despite the late-medieval trappings—the novel is full of technical terms such as *houppelande*, *gisarme*, *glaive*, *bliaut*, and *cotehardie*—Updike's Gertrude is a Danish Emma Bovary. And into her emotionally impoverished world comes Claudius, who has all of the dark, romantic allure of the nineteenth-century seducer. His eyes, Updike writes,

were brown and slightly slant, with dramatically thick eyelashes, like an actor's eye-rings of kohl. His nose was hooked, with avid flared nostrils. . . . He had marinated in a saturnine essence. . . . He had the wiry vitality of one who had escaped moral constraints.

In Victorian novels, this figure is invariably punished; but, as befits a modern fiction, in *Gertrude and Claudius* he has virtually all of our sympathy. Small wonder that Gertrude cannot resist him.

Early in the novel Gertrude's father, King Rorik, trying to persuade his daughter to marry Hamlet, says that they are both "fine specimens of our northern vigor—blond beasts, one could say." The slightly self-conscious "one could say" (a bit out of place in the mouth of the rough-hewn Danish king) is a signal that Updike is quoting—not Shakespeare but Nietz-

sche, for whom the "blond beast" was an emblem of humanity liberated from the slave morality of Jews and Christians. The Danes, in Updike's account, have been Christianized, and Rorik turns out to be wrong about his son-in-law. Hamlet "listens to priests," Gertrude tells her father, sometime after the marriage, a fact that Rorik explains again in Nietzschean terms: "this religion of slaves, and then of peasants and of merchants, holds the future in it."

But Gertrude, though she was baptized, is not so securely Christianized. As Hamlet's dutiful wife, Gertrude leads a placid and conventionally pious life, but her ripe, vital sensuality marks her deep, underlying kinship with a world that has not submitted wholeheartedly to the Christian yoke. Hence, when she meets Claudius, with his air of having somehow escaped moral constraints, Gertrude is not put off: "She sensed that this man could casually lie and deceive those who loved him, but this did not repel her; it gave his interior in her mind's eye something of his exterior's agreeably creased, contoured texture."

Lying and deceit are not, to be sure, the hallmarks of the "blond beast"—we might recall that Claudius is dark-complexioned—but at least they signal some resistance to the smug, provincial con-

ventionality that rules in Denmark. "I think your father was no profounder a convert than mine," Claudius remarks to Gertrude, and then adds nostalgically, as if he too had been reading his Nietzsche, "They lived and killed with the innocence of animals." The "agreeably creased, contoured texture" that Gertrude admires finds seductive expression in Claudius's stories about far-off Genoa, Venice, and Byzantium, and still more in his succession of marvelous gifts. These gifts culminate in a long woman's tunic made out of a cloth new to Denmark. "The thread," Claudius explains to Gertrude, "is secreted by horned green worms fed only on mulberry leaves."

Up to this point, they have only been heavily flirting. It is the silk that brings the long erotic dance to its climax: Gertrude "touched the shimmering cloth, and in that touch was her undoing." Shakespeare's ghost laments that lust, "though to a radiant angel linked/Will sate itself in a celestial bed/And prey on garbage." In Updike's careful undoing of this account, old Hamlet was no radiant angel: "the grease of his breakfast meats gleaming on his beard, his belly as swollen as that of any merchant he schemed to rob." And the wily Claudius, though immoral, was hardly garbage. Updike makes it impossible to fault

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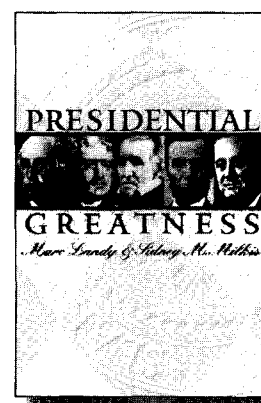
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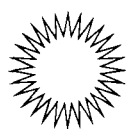
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the wife for preferring her fascinating brother-in-law to her swinish husband.

There was a nineteenth-century tradition of imagining the lives of Shakespeare's characters before they make their appearance in the plays; the most famous exercise in the genre is Mary Cowden Clarke's classic *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*, which appeared in 1875. John Updike has contrived to revive this slightly dubious genre and to make a brilliant novel out of it. *Gertrude and Clau-*

dius succeeds by setting itself against Shakespeare's play, in the sense that it contradicts the vision that dominates *Hamlet*, and in the sense that it uses *Hamlet* as its ultimate, unspoken point of reference. The novel can celebrate the seductive murderer because Updike knows—and he knows that we know—what lies just over the horizon. "He had gotten away with it," the novel ends, inside the triumphant Claudius's self-satisfied brain. "All would be well." ■

Book of Samuel. (It is not surprising that Auerbach chose passages from Genesis and Samuel to illustrate his theme, since these are certainly the two sustained masterpieces of biblical prose.) Here, in Robert Alter's new translation, are the opening verses of Samuel II, chapter eleven, which tell of David's fateful liaison with Bathsheba:

And it happened at the turn of the year, at the time the kings sally forth, that David sent out Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. And David was sitting in Jerusalem. And it happened at eventide that David arose from his bed and walked about on the roof of the king's house, and he saw from the roof a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired after the woman, and the one he sent said, "Why, this is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam wife of Uriah the Hittite." And David sent messengers and fetched her and she came to him and he lay with her, she just having cleansed herself of her impurity, and she returned to her house. And the woman became pregnant and sent and told David and said, "I am pregnant." And David sent to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah the Hittite to David.

As Alter points out in his superb commentary, a number of things can be deduced from this terse passage, even though they are not mentioned in it. We know that it is a hot spring day, since springtime marks the beginning of the Middle Eastern dry season when military campaigns were commenced, and the weather must be warm enough for Bathsheba to bathe on her roof. We know also that David, whose troops (among them Bathsheba's husband, Uriah) are fighting in the field, is leading an indolent life in his palace, for, as Alter writes, "a siesta on a hot spring day would begin not long after noon, so that the king has been in bed an inordinately long time." And we know, too, that "the palace is situated on a height, so David can look down on the naked Bathsheba."

There are still other narrative innuendoes that Alter—no doubt because, as he remarks, "the temptations to comment at great length on the minute details of this inexhaustible story are [so] great" that the commentator must restrain himself—does not discuss. We can safely assume, for example, that no other house in Jerusalem possesses a vantage point like that of David's palace, since Bathsheba would hardly choose to bathe naked in the public view. But does she know that David can

Sacred Implications

By HILLEL HALKIN

The David Story: A Translation With Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel by Robert Alter

(Norton, 448 pp., \$30)

Give Us a King!: Samuel, Saul, and David by Everett Fox

(Schocken Books, 336 pp., \$26)

IT WAS THE German-Jewish literary scholar Erich Auerbach who, in a masterly comparison of Homer and the Bible in the opening chapter of his book *Mimesis*, in the early 1940s produced the first modern analysis of the radical minimalism of biblical prose narrative. In Homer, Auerbach observed, everything is "foregrounded" and "brought to light in perfect fullness," so that "a continuous rhythmic procession of phenomena passes by, and never is there a form left fragmentary or half-illuminated, never a lacuna, never a gap, never a glimpse of unplumbed depths"; but the Hebrew Bible works in a contrasting manner. Here, all is "left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal ... remains mysterious and 'fraught with

background.'"

"Fraught with background" might not be a phrase that one would normally associate with biblical narrative, since background is precisely what is missing from it. And yet, as Auerbach suggests in speaking of the Bible's "call for interpretation," it is this very lack of a contextualizing environment that compels the engaged reader to search for one. It is as if the biblical story were composed largely of blank spaces that appear to be mere gaps at first glance, but prove infinitely capacious once they are entered—richly inhabitable recesses leading from one bare verse to the next. If midrash, to use the Hebrew word for the imaginative occupation of these spaces, has been a common response to the Bible over the centuries, this is not only because creative exegesis was often the only way of challenging or reformulating biblical authority. It is also because the biblical text is calculated to lure us into its depths. Thomas Mann set out to write a novella set in biblical Egypt and ended up producing the four volumes of midrash that are *Joseph and His Brothers*; and this is but an extreme example of what can happen when one wanders into the biblical texts.

Let us take a case in point from the

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see her? She must know, since his palace cannot be far-off; if it were, he would be unable to tell in the evening light that she is beautiful. (Hence we also know that Uriah is a high officer, as no ordinary soldier would be living so close to the king.) And this leads to a more momentous realization: if Bathsheba—who has just finished her menstrual period, during which she is enjoined by biblical law from sexual relations—knows she can be seen by the king and nonetheless takes her bath, then obviously she wants to be seen by him. And if David is in the habit of taking afternoon naps and stepping out on his roof for a breath of evening air, then she has deliberately picked the time of day when he is most likely to see her.

Let us press a bit further. Bathsheba is not a sexual victim commandeered by force majeure, but a seductress well aware of David's weakness (known to us from previous chapters) for beautiful women. Yet she is also subtle enough to spurn his first advances. How, you ask, can such a view be maintained when the Bible tells us explicitly, "And David sent messengers and fetched her and she came to him"? But that's just it: the text says "messengers," in the plural. Surely David has not sent a cohort of them to escort Bathsheba, an adulteress being summoned to a secret tryst, ceremoniously through the streets. No, the messengers are sent one by one; and if there is a need for a second and a third, the first and the second have been rejected....

IS ALL THIS and more actually "in" the biblical text? It is enough, I think, that it can be construed as being there. And if it can be so inferred—saying little while implying much is the *modus operandi* of biblical narrative—then the translator's task would seem to be an easy one. For what more need be done than choose words and sentences which, like the Bible's, are extremely simple, while letting the spaces between them do the work? Indeed, it is hardly possible to get much simpler than the prose of Samuel. The book's vocabulary is small; its syntax rudimentary and direct; its Hebrew tense system vague and primitive compared to the complex precision of English.

Why then do we hear so much about the enormous difficulty of biblical translation, or about the impossibility of surpassing the King James Version of 1611, which, despite its archaisms and its numerous competitors, is preferred by many readers to this day? Perhaps because sparseness of language has at least as many pitfalls for the translator as plentitude. It might appear a commonsense proposition, for instance, that if Language X has five differently nuanced verbs to

signify a cluster of actions for which Language Y has only one, then more meaning will be lost going from X to Y than vice versa; but this is not necessarily the case. Since the single verb in Y has the potential to mean what all five of the verbs in X mean, the need to eliminate four of these words narrows the semantic range of the translation, and thereby screens interpretative possibilities from the reader.

Consider the passage that I have cited. What might strike the English reader as the odd diction of Alter's "And David was sitting in Jerusalem" is an attempt to do justice to the Hebrew's *veDavid yoshev beYerushalayim*, in which the verb *yoshev*, which commonly means "sitting," has the meaning of "residing" or "staying in." (It can also mean "existing" or "enduring.") Why not, then, translate the verse as "And David stayed in Jerusalem," as Everett Fox has done in his new translation of Samuel? Because, writes Alter in his commentary, "it is best to preserve the literal sense because of the pointed sequence sitting, rising, lying, and because in biblical usage, 'to sit' is also an antonym of 'to go out' (or sally forth)." I would put it even more strongly: by remaining in Jerusalem while his army is campaigning, David *is* sitting—on his hands. Implicit in *yoshev* is a moral criticism of the corrupting influence of the

kingship that has passed to David from Saul. As a rebel leader on the run from Saul, after all, David was always at the forefront of his troops; but he is there no longer, and it is this same laxness that now drags him into an affair with the wife of an officer and then into his murder.

Of course, all languages have words with multiple meanings: punning and verbal ambiguity depend on them. But the more lexically restricted a language is, the higher the incidence of them will be; and predicaments like having to choose between the more idiomatic but less suggestive "David stayed" and the awkward but psychologically richer "David was sitting" will occur more often when translating into them. The King James Version, which has "And David tarried still at Jerusalem," hit on a fine solution. Indeed, another reason that the modern translator of the Bible faces a daunting task is that the King James version has preempted so many fine solutions (while accustoming the English reader to numerous turns of phrase from which any innovative departure seems jarring) that operating in its shadow is a serious handicap.

In general, a language with a relative paucity of rhetorical means must resort to its own literary stratagems. And so, as Alter observes, "the Bible turns everywhere not on variation," as is generally the



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case with English, but on "significant repetition." Note, for example, how many times the verb "sent" recurs in our passage, building up with growing ominousness to the verse: "And ... David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah ... saying, 'Put Uriah in the face of the fiercest battling and draw back, so that he will be struck down and die.'" Although in English one instinctively recoils from such monotony, the translator seeking to vary the Hebrew "sent" with such contextually appropriate English words as "dispatched," "contacted," "investigated," and so forth, commits what Alter rightly calls "the abomination of synonymous elegance."

Note, too, how what is probably the best-known feature of biblical narrative style, its heavy reliance on the conjunction "and." (This is partly the result of a grammar in which this word proclitically converts a verb attached to it from the imperfect to the perfect tense.) The Biblical "and" isolates and magnifies each action, causing it momentarily to occupy our entire field of vision while at the same time making it an equal link in a long chain forged from every action preceding it and following it. Not even Hemingway, whose predilection for simple "and"-clauses may have owed something to biblical narrative, ever wrote English this way. Still, to naturalize biblical syntax by introducing dependent clauses and subordinating conjunctions such as "since" and "when," as has been done by recent translators such as David Rosenberg and Stephen Mitchell, is to denaturalize the biblical Hebrew. The Bible is a book from which translators who put a premium on naturalness are advised to stay away.

BUT HOW UNNATURAL can a biblical translator want to be? Here is how Everett Fox, who has also done the Five Books of Moses, deals with the rape by David's son Amnon of his half-sister Tamar in chapter thirteen of Samuel II:

So Amnon lay-down and feigned-sickness, and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king: Pray let Tamar my sister come and heat two heart-shaped-dumplings before my eyes, that I may be-fed from her (own) hand. So Tamar went to the house of Amnon her brother, while he was lying-down, she took some dough, kneaded (it), heated (it) before his eyes, and boiled the heart-shaped-dumplings. ... Amnon said: Have everyone go out from me! And everyone went out from him. ... So Tamar took the heart-shaped-dumplings that she had made, and brought them to Amnon her brother, into the inner room.

When she had brought (them) close to him (for him) to eat, he overpowered her and said to her: Come, lie with me, sister! She said to him: No, brother, do *not* force me, for such is not to be done in Israel—don't do this vile-thing ... you would be like one of the vile-ones in Israel! ... He overpowered her and forced her, lying with her. And (then) Amnon hated her with an exceedingly great hatred, indeed, greater was the hatred with which he hated her than the love with which he had loved her; Amnon said to her: Get-up, go-away! She said to him: About this great evil—more than the other-thing that you did to me—sending me away! ... Now King David heard about all these things, and he was exceedingly upset.

Fox's justification for such prose is that "*hearing* the Hebrew text of the Bible is as important as *reading* it," thus requiring "a translation that encourages the reader/listener to pay particular attention to the text's aural characteristics: its structures, its plays on names and other words, and its use of repetition." Fox has often cited as his model the renowned Martin Buber-Franz Rosenzweig translation of the Bible into German that was done in the 1920s. His translation has the merit of wrenching the English so out of shape that the structure of the Hebrew shows through, jolting us with its strangeness. Yet much of it (such as its many hyphens and parentheses) never reaches the ear at all, and the structure bared has the aesthetic value of the beams in a ruined house.

The same cannot be said about the Buber-Rosenzweig translation, which successfully sought to be both *Hebraic* and *German*. When Amnon asks in it for *Herzkringel*—a translation of the Hebrew *levivot*, which probably means no more than "pancakes" but is also a play on *lev* or *levar*, that is, "heart," or *Herz* in German—the word may be the translators' invention, but it sounds like a word that Amnon might use. Fox's "heart-shaped-dumplings," on the other hand, belongs in a note at the bottom of the page. Similarly, while Fox sticks verbatim to the apparently textually garbled Hebrew of Tamar's last line, Buber and Rosenzweig try to make sense of it by rendering it this way: "*Sie sprach zu ihm wegen dieser noch grösseren Bosheit: Noch über das andre was du mir angetan hast! mich fortzuschicken!*," or "She said to him regarding this even greater evil: 'After the other thing you did to me! to send me away!'"

Alter follows Buber and Rosenzweig more closely here than does Fox. ("And she said to him: 'Don't! this wrong is greater than the other you did me, to send

me away now.”) On the whole, his translation of Samuel, like his previous translation of Genesis, is marked by the same mixture of good sense and erudition that characterizes him as a critic. It replicates the Hebrew’s quiet gravity with a modest English that does not strive for effects, and even when questioning its choice of a word one sees the thoughtfulness behind it. Its main shortcoming is an occasional loftiness, as when it has Tamar tell her brother, “And you, you would be like one of the scurrilous fellows in Israel.” Not that the King James Version, with its “And as for thee, thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel,” does any better. Fox is more accurate in conveying, if not Tamar’s desperation, at least the harshness of the Hebrew word *nevalim*. “And the whole country will know how vile you are!” would be more like it.

IN THE END, though, it is hard to beat the King James. It is solemn but rarely inflated, and its cadences are flawless, each verse passing through our consciousness like footsteps that stop and start and leave us wondering. And it has had 400 years to be absorbed and feel like English—even longer in fact, since it leans heavily on older translations such as William Tyndale’s. Moreover, this translation was still produced in an age of religious belief. Faith is everywhere in the King James, as present in its close literalism as in its scrupulous pursuit of the best English alternative. Its literary sophistication combined with its fear of tampering with the sacred aligns it more with the mentality of the biblical author than is possible today. That is why we keep coming back to it.

And it will be worth coming back to it with Alter’s commentary in hand. Proceeding verse by verse, in the manner of the medieval Hebrew commentators, Alter shares their linguistic but not their homiletic and theological concerns. His own perspective is literary and psychological. Here is part of what he has to say on the verse “King David had heard all these things, and he was greatly incensed” [“exceedingly upset” in Fox]:

[His] imponderable silence is the key to the mounting avalanche in the house of David. Where we might expect some after-the-fact defense of his violated daughter, some rebuke or punishment of his rapist son, he hears, is angry, but says nothing and does nothing, leaving the field open for [the full brother of Tamar] Absalom’s murder of his brother [Amnon]. In all this, the rape of Tamar plays exactly the same pivotal role in the story of David as does the rape of Dinah in the story of Jacob. Jacob, too, “hears”

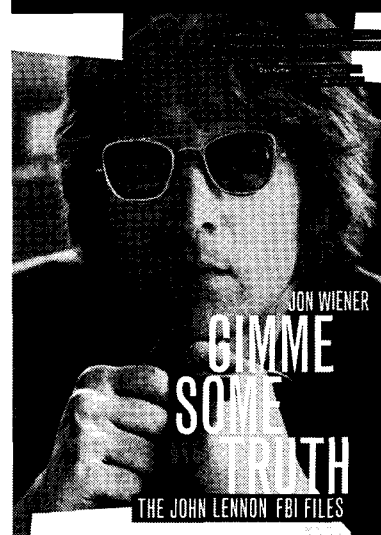
of the violation and does nothing, setting the stage for the bloody act of vengeance carried out by his sons Simeon and Levi. By the end of the episode, Jacob is seen at the mercy of his intransigent sons, and that is how this once-powerful figure will appear through the rest of the story. An analogous fate, as we shall abundantly see, awaits David from this moment on.

This double insight, which spots a submerged explanation of how David’s inaction is responsible for his future woes (for it is Absalom’s banishment after murdering Amnon that leads to his insurrection and the civil war that he dies in, breaking his father’s heart) while pointing out a striking parallel with Genesis (a book to which Samuel is indeed closely related), is typical of the way in which Alter shows us how richly laden is the biblical text. And as always, it is even more laden than he has the space to expound on, for the book of Samuel does tell us, I think, why David’s inaction is not “imponderable” at all.

THE CHAPTER RELATING the rape of Tamar comes after the story of David and Bathsheba, at the end of which David is harshly reproved by the prophet Nathan for Uriah’s murder and suffers the first of the punishments that Nathan has predicted—the death of the infant son borne to him by Bathsheba. It is the first time that we read of things going badly wrong for the king. Until now he has been the darling of fate—or as Harold Bloom puts it in his quirky *The Book of J.*, the “charmed object of Yahweh’s election-love.” Now the confidence that has unerringly guided him in the past falters all at once, as much because of his sense of guilt as because of the devastating realization that God has fallen out of love with him. It is this that paralyzes David, a man who has always been quick to act, since he cannot punish his son for behaving brutally on a sexual impulse when he himself has done worse.

Dashing in his leadership, steady in his courage, magnificent in his gallantry, David never touches us so deeply as when he is humbled by guilt and grief. These bring him closer to us; and it is fitting that, as a weakened old man in the opening chapters of the Book of Kings (which Alter has wisely included in his translation as the real ending of Samuel), he lives to see Solomon, his child with Bathsheba, crowned over his other sons. The choice of Solomon is God’s, too, and it tells us that David is forgiven, and that God has secretly gone on loving him all along. Solomon is not, of course, the baby who has died; and yet in a sense, he is; for the God who takes is the God who gives; and

“Remarkable...



Wiener’s commentary is as sprightly as the documents are foolish.”

—Todd Gitlin, author of *The Sixties*

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in the soil of contrition, redemption grows from the seed of sin.

Solomon's rule will be a wise and peaceful one of royal splendor, and here, too, one is reminded of Genesis, which ends with the grand and reconciling ascendancy of Joseph in the court of Pharaoh. Both books begin in innocence (the creation of Adam and Eve, and the young Saul crowned by Samuel, "a fine and goodly young fellow, and no man of the Israelites was goodlier than he"); both plunge into early disappointment as these creatures of bright hope let down a demanding God and a querulous prophet; both rise again on the crest of a new promise in and to the great-hearted figures of Abraham and David; both then sink into a morass of family quarrels, disputed inheritances, intimate betrayals, love turned to rancor, passion gone outlaw, the promise to all appearances wrecked; in both complication leads to complication and ensnarlment to worse ensnarlment by an inexorable psychological and emotional logic, the "and.... and.... and"-clauses of

the narrative snapping shut link after link; and both conclude with wondrous pardon.

One might be allowed the surmise that both were written by the same immensely gifted, much saddened by life, and spiritually indomitable individual. Harold Bloom, who thinks that their authors, whom he places in Solomon's court, were merely good friends, has called these works "Shakespearian," and, as anachronistic as the label may be, one sees his point. It is in the work of Shakespeare, more than anywhere, that we have the true European equivalent of Samuel and Genesis, in the great courtly codas of the last plays, in which irrevocable loss is miraculously restored and made good in so poetically true a fashion that we actually believe, without for a moment forgetting life's bitterness, in life's great mercy. Every English translation of these Biblical narratives reveals things unseen before. "Turn it and turn it," the ancient rabbis recommend about a book such as Samuel, "for all is in it." ■

in 1981, left the reader with more negative images than positive ones. In recent years, however, a Grant revival has taken place, fueled in part by the outstanding edition of Grant's papers produced by John Y. Simon and his colleagues at Southern Illinois University. New scholarship bids fair to restore Grant's reputation as one of the great captains of history, and even to elevate his presidency several notches in the historical rankings. Numerous historians, including John Keegan, Frank Scaturro, myself, and Brooks Simpson in earlier works, have offered largely positive but balanced appraisals of Grant's military and political career. In 1997, Geoffrey Perret published a sympathetic and readable one-volume biography, and later this year an even more lucid and penetrating biography by Jean Smith will appear.

"IN TREATING GRANT with empathy," writes Simpson in the preface, "I have guarded against becoming too sympathetic, let alone apologetic, although those readers who hold a negative assessment of Grant may disagree." Simpson's claims that he is neither "Grant's advocate nor antagonist," and that he analyzes Grant's "strengths and weaknesses, his virtues and his vices," are accurate; but he finds that Grant's strengths and virtues clearly outweigh his weaknesses and vices: "Critics who question his military renown fail to appreciate just how valuable common sense, character, courage, intuition, and the ability to cope with circumstances are to the making of a great commander."

Simpson briefly chronicles Grant's early life, his middling record at West Point (he graduated twenty-first of thirty in the class of 1843, but thirty-eight other cadets had washed out before graduation), his good record as a junior officer in the Mexican War, his happy marriage to Julia Dent and his difficult relationship with both her father and his own father, his frustration and his loneliness while serving at remote posts on the West Coast, his resignation from the army under a cloud in 1854, charged with drunkenness, and his lack of success in civilian occupations during the late 1850s. The outbreak of war in 1861 found the thirty-nine-year-old Grant working as a salesman in his father's leather store at Galena, Illinois.

The antebellum years occupy less than one-fifth of Simpson's book. There are no surprises here, and little new information. But these chapters set the stage for the remaining four-fifths of the volume, which cover the four years of war. Simpson hits his stride in the narrative and the analysis of Grant's rise in three years from store clerk to commander of the armies of

The Riddle of the Victor

By JAMES M. MCPHERSON

Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865 by Brooks D. Simpson

(Houghton Mifflin, 533 pp., \$35)

MANY PEOPLE WITH a casual interest in American history think they know four things about Ulysses S. Grant: he was a drunk; he failed at everything he tried before the Civil War; he managed to overcome Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia only by blunt, hammering tactics at enormous human cost; and his two presidential terms were riddled with corruption and cronyism. Hailed in his own time as the savior of the republic, Grant's reputation in the next half-century sank more precipitously than that of any other major figure in our history. Countless historians have quoted Henry Adams's quip that "the progress of evolution from President Washington to President Grant was

alone evidence enough to upset Darwin." As Brooks D. Simpson notes with wry understatement in the first volume of his new biography, "Grant has not fared well as a biographical subject."

There have been exceptions. In the 1930s, the British military historian J.F.C. Fuller compared Grant favorably with Lee, and judged him the foremost general of the Civil War. The American historians T. Harry Williams and Kenneth P. Williams echoed these conclusions in the 1950s. In 1950, Lloyd Lewis published the first of a projected multi-volume biography carrying Grant's career to the start of the Civil War, but he died before he could complete the task. Bruce Catton continued the project in the 1960s with two superb and sympathetic volumes on Grant's wartime generalship.

These books dented but did not overturn the popular impression of Grant as a mediocrity and a military "butcher." And William McFeely's *Grant*, which appeared

JAMES M. MCPHERSON is professor of history at Princeton University, and author of *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford University Press).

the United States. This is the best study of Grant's military career since Bruce Catton's two volumes; and on many matters it exceeds Catton, as a consequence of the immense amount of Civil War scholarship during the past thirty years, which Simpson has thoroughly mastered. He has provided us with perhaps the best treatment of Union military command and strategy now in print.

ALMOST EVERYONE WHO had known Grant before 1861 underestimated this impecunious ex-captain. The governor of Illinois and the War Department shunted aside or ignored his initial offer to serve. Only the influence of Congressman Elihu Washburne, who had befriended Grant in Galena and remained his champion throughout the war, secured Grant an appointment as colonel of an Illinois regiment in June 1861 and as brigadier general later that year. Grant immediately exhibited the qualities of quiet authority, *sangfroid*, and control of men and of himself that became his hallmark as a commander. He turned the unruly farm boys of the 21st Illinois, whose lack of discipline had driven their first colonel from the service, into an effective fighting unit.

Grant's ascent thereafter was steady, if not meteoric: command of a brigade, a division, an army (Army of the Tennessee), an army group, and all the armies of the United States. Along the way, troops under his command forced the surrender of three enemy armies: at Fort Donelson on February 16, 1862; at Vicksburg on July 4, 1863; and at Appomattox on April 9, 1865. No other general in American history came close to this achievement. Grant did not win all of his battles, but he never suffered a decisive defeat. What is most important, he won all of his campaigns.

What explained Grant's success? Many contemporaries asked the same question. None could answer it, least of all Grant's closest wartime colleague, William Tecumseh Sherman. "I knew him as a cadet at West Point," wrote Sherman after the war, "as a lieutenant of the Fourth Infantry, as a citizen of St. Louis, and as a growing general all through the bloody Civil War. Yet to me he is a mystery, and I believe he is a mystery to himself." Shy with strangers, uncomfortable in the limelight, notoriously taciturn, Grant earned a reputation as "the American Sphinx." Yet wherever he went, things got done—quietly, efficiently, quickly, with no wasted motion. In crisis situations during combat, Grant remained calm. He never panicked. He persevered, and he never accepted defeat even when he appeared to be beaten. In his first battle, at Belmont, Missouri, on November 7, 1861, Grant's

brigade initially broke the enemy line, but Confederate reinforcements then threatened to surround them and cut them off. Harried subordinates counseled surrender, but Grant simply remarked: "We had cut our way in and could cut our way out just as well." At Fort Donelson on February 15, 1862, a Confederate breakout attack had broken the Union right during Grant's temporary absence, when he was consulting with the Union naval commander three miles downriver. Grant returned to find his division commander in that sector shocked and confused, the troops on the edge of panic. Where others perceived disaster, Grant saw opportunity. "Some of our men are pretty badly demoralized," he said to a staff officer, "but the enemy must be more so, for he has attempted to force his way out, but has fallen back: the one who attacks first now will be victorious and the enemy will have to be in a hurry if he gets ahead of me." Suiting action to words, Grant ordered his left division to make a diversionary counterattack, reorganized the right, repaired the breach, penned up the Confederates in their defenses, and compelled their surrender. Two months later, on the first day of the battle of Shiloh, Confederate attacks drove back the outnumbered Union forces in the bloodiest carnage of the war thus far. At the end of the day, Grant's battered men held a precarious line along the bluff with the Tennessee River at their backs. A subordinate advised retreat under cover of darkness. Grant acknowledged how badly his army had been hurt, but he believed he had hurt the enemy just as badly, and Union reinforcements were arriving from across the river. So he responded: "Retreat? No. I propose to attack at daylight and whip them." And so he did.

THESE ACTIONS FORMED a pattern for the rest of the war. But it is one thing to describe Grant's calmness under pressure, his ability quickly to size up a situation, and his decisiveness in action; it is quite another to explain the inner sources of these strengths. "The answers are many, varied, and ultimately unsatisfactory," Simpson confesses. Still, his biography comes closer to providing answers than anything that we have. Grant possessed that most uncommon quality, common sense. He had the capacity—like Harry Truman, whom Grant resembled in many ways—to make a decision and to stick to it. As Sherman put it, Grant "aimed to achieve results, caring little for the manner by which they were accomplished." Union General John Schofield noted that the most extraordinary quality of Grant's "extraordinary character" was "its extreme simplicity—so extreme that many have entirely overlooked

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it in their search for some deeply hidden secret to account for so great a character, unmindful that simplicity is one of the most prominent attributes of greatness." Grant made it look easy.

Grant modeled himself, consciously or unconsciously, on Zachary Taylor, his old commander in the Mexican War. "General Taylor" wrote Grant, "never made any great show or parade, either of uniform or retinue." Neither did Grant. "But he was known to every soldier in his army, and was respected by all." So was Grant. "Taylor was not a great conversationalist." Nor was Grant. "But on paper he could put his meaning so plainly that there could be no mistaking it." So could Grant: one of his virtues as a commander was the clarity of his orders and dispatches. "No soldier could face either danger or responsibility more calmly than Taylor. These are qualities more rarely found than genius or physical courage."

Grant proved his physical courage under fire many times in the Mexican War as well as in the Civil War. So did many others. But as Grant noted, the willingness to take responsibility and to make decisions—or what Grant called "moral courage"—was much rarer. It is a readiness to take risks, and to accept the possibility of failure, for without the risk of failure there is no chance of success. Fear

of failure causes paralysis of will and evasion of action. Grant and Lee were the pre-eminent Civil War commanders because, more than any others, they were the ones who were willing to take the risks. They possessed moral courage. Grant, after all, had known failure. He started the war with a lowly position and no reputation; and as Simpson notes, "perhaps he was not afraid of failure because he had encountered setbacks so many times."

Grant also possessed what Simpson calls a "sense of self." Even when others did not believe in him, he believed in himself. A passage in Grant's memoirs portrays a revelatory moment early in the war when this sense of self translated into moral courage. His first field operation as colonel of the 21st Illinois, in July 1861, was to find and break up a Confederate guerrilla band in Missouri commanded by one Tom Harris. "My sensations as we approached what I supposed might be 'a field of battle' were anything but agreeable," Grant recalled. "I had been in all the engagements in Mexico that it was possible for one person to be in; but not in command. If some one else had been colonel and I had been lieutenant-colonel I do not think I would have felt any trepidation." When they reached the enemy camp, they found it abandoned. Grant's anxieties disappeared. "It occurred to me at once that

Harris had been as much afraid of me as I had been of him. . . . From that event to the close of the war . . . I never forgot that the enemy had as much reason to fear my forces as I had his. The lesson was valuable."

AS SIMPSON NOTES, this quality in Grant's leadership had its obverse side: sometimes he should have feared the enemy, or at least paid more heed to the enemy's possible intentions. At Belmont, at Fort Donelson, and above all at Shiloh, Grant focused so intently on his own plans that he overlooked the possibility that the enemy might attack. As he ruefully admitted, he was surprised at Shiloh: "The fact is, I regarded the campaign we were engaged in as an offensive one and had no idea that the enemy would leave strong entrenchments to take the initiative." Thereafter he had a healthier respect for what the enemy might do. But he never allowed this respect to paralyze thought or action.

Another revealing moment occurred during the battle of the Wilderness, two years to the day after Grant had been surprised at Shiloh. When Grant came east to take command of all Union armies, he found the command structure of the Army of the Potomac mesmerized by their two years of mostly losing campaigns

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against Lee. At dusk on May 6, 1864, a Confederate assault on the Union right in the Wilderness temporarily caved in that flank. A distraught officer rode up to Grant's headquarters and cried out: "This is a crisis. . . . I know Lee's methods well by past experience; he will throw his whole army between us and the Rapidan, and cut us off completely from our communications." Grant replied in exasperation: "I am heartily tired of hearing about what Lee is going to do. Some of you always seem to think he is suddenly going to turn a double somersault, and land in our rear and on both of our flanks at the same time. Go back to your command, and try to think what we are going to do ourselves, instead of what Lee is going to do."

The battle of the Wilderness opened the final campaign of the war in Virginia, which culminated at Appomattox eleven months later. This campaign witnessed the most relentless fighting and the most cruel carnage of the war, with a prolonged stalemate in the trenches before Petersburg and Richmond that anticipated the Western front in World War I. Historians often describe these events as Grant's "campaign of attrition" to grind down the Confederates with superior numbers and resources. Union frontal assaults at Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, and Petersburg gave Grant the label of "butcher."

This description is distorted. The campaign turned out to be one of attrition, but that was more Lee's doing than Grant's. The Union commander intended to maneuver Lee into a position for open-field combat; Lee parried these efforts from elaborate entrenchments with the hope of holding out long enough to discourage the Northern people and force their leaders to make peace—a strategy of psychological attrition. It almost worked, but Lincoln's reelection and Grant's determination to stay the course brought victory in the end. And if any general deserved the label "butcher," it was Lee: although the Confederates had the advantage of fighting on the defensive most of the time, they suffered almost as high a percentage of casualties as the Union forces. For the war as a whole, Lee's army had a higher casualty rate than the armies commanded by Grant. The romantic glorification of the Confederacy by generations of Lost Cause writers has obscured this truth.

Simpson's research has uncovered what he considers to be surprising evidence about the Lincoln-Grant relationship (good, but more wary at first than others have portrayed it), about Grant's grasp of the politics of war including the slavery issue (sensible and pro-emancipation), and other matters. Grant initially wanted to keep the slavery issue out of the way,

but like Lincoln he soon concluded that it was central to the war. Simpson may overstate the degree of Grant's revisionism on these questions, but he does offer the best treatment we have for many of them. His analysis of Grant's frustrating relationship with the command structure of the Army of the Potomac in 1864 is eye-opening.

Perhaps Simpson's most penetrating insights into Grant's character concern the question of his drinking. If any one facet of Grant's popular image stands out more than others, it is Grant the drunk. As Simpson makes clear, this image is based a little on evidence and a lot on gossip, envy, and vengefulness. The truth seems to be that heavy drinking was the norm among officers in the antebellum army, to assuage the boredom of peacetime routine at remote outposts. Grant probably drank less than his peers, but he could not hold his liquor well. In 1854, two years and 2,000 miles away from his family, including an infant son whom he had never seen, he probably drank to excess and may have resigned to escape a court martial for being drunk on duty. Whatever happened, the story of his drinking became a staple of gossip in the old army. Grant "never shook the stories," writes Simpson; "they would haunt him for the rest of his life."

During the war such stories proliferated, usually circulated by dishonest war contractors, corrupt subordinates, or jealous rivals whom Grant had reprimanded, dismissed, or supplanted. "Any time he offended someone," notes Simpson, "that someone was sure to whisper that the general was a drunkard." The two most notorious incidents of Grant's drunkenness during the war—during the Vicksburg campaign and soon after it—never happened, according to Simpson. Although Grant sometimes took a drink during the war and may on occasion have taken two, his colleagues who knew him best and were in the best position to observe him were unanimous in their testimony that he was rarely if ever drunk. Simpson's findings should lay to rest the image of Grant the drunk—but given the power of myth over reality, they probably will not.

By the time of Appomattox, Grant had achieved a reputation as one of the great captains of history. He had mastered the challenges of war; the challenges of peace with former enemies and justice for freed slaves remained. As general-in-chief of an occupying army, he could not ignore these challenges. As president after 1868, he could not avoid them. One eagerly awaits Simpson's second volume for the rest of the story. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 4

draw the distinction between admirable heroic sacrifice and tragic intellectual and moral error? Did Bernall have any duty at all to tell the truth to the evil or delusional or sociopathic thugs who had her in their power? Does one owe the truth to such individuals? This is a complex and difficult question, and one that many moral philosophers (e.g., many Kantians) would answer in the affirmative. However, some part of me cannot help being sorry that, in the reading that was a part of her spiritual quest, Bernall did not come across these lines from Karl Jaspers describing his response to being under the power of Nazi thugs: "We had . . . if need be to lie without scruples. For beasts in possession of an absolute power to destroy must be treated with cunning and not as men and rational beings."

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Arizona State University
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Moving bowels

TO THE EDITORS:

Andrew Butterfield illustrates Peter Robb's sometimes "merely crude and shocking"

style by noting that, in "translating a line from the Bible, Robb has Jesus say to Paul that 'it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks'" ("Brushes with Death," January 17). It is the King James Version of the Bible whose style is, or seems to be, crude and shocking here. The line occurs in Acts 9:5 and is mostly ignored by contemporary translators. It refers to a draft animal's kicking against the goads, or pricks, that are placed so as to keep him from kicking while in harness, and it means, in contemporary terms, "your behavior is self-destructive."

The King James Version likes to be literal in translating and as concrete in its language as the Hebrew and Greek of its sources. So David threatens to kill "any that pisseth against the wall"—that is, all males—in the household of his enemy (1 Samuel 25:22). And the bride in Song of Solomon says of her beloved, "My bowels were moved for him"—meaning, as contemporary translators would have it, her heart. Passages such as these enlivened many an adolescent Bible study in the earlier half of the twentieth century.

GLENN MEETER
DeKalb, Illinois

WASHINGTON DIARIST

Playing God

LIKE HIS FATHER, GEORGE W. Bush sounds hesitant when he is actually most convinced. His father, who had charm, made this hesitancy sound like the battered modesty of the powerfully born; his son makes it sound like the perfected arrogance of the born impotent. William Gass jokes in a recent novel that if America ever had a dictator, it would nickname him Coach. But how much more American, really, it would be to elect a president who acts like a coach. George W., whose chief expertise before becoming governor was hanging around a baseball team he partly owned, is just the man.

IN ONE AREA, HOWEVER, BUSH IS EXTREMELY convinced, not at all hesitant, and more dictator than coach: in his life-and-death command of the inmates on Texas's death row. One of the vilest things Bush likes to say is that, in opposing abortion, he has been a "pro-life governor." This is really an affront to language and morality. This pro-life governor has executed 113 people in his five-year tenure, more than a sixth of all the Americans executed since 1976. In one week in 1997, the pro-life governor had four prisoners put to death; in January of this year, he polished off another seven. The question here is not the rights and wrongs of the death penalty. The question is whether Bush has the right, figuratively speaking, to his title of pro-life. And whether these actions, by a man who claims Jesus Christ as his greatest political influence, can be called Christian.

FOR THE TRUTH IS THAT, WHEN THE state kills, it is not some murderous abstraction but actual human beings doing the killing. People design the chair or manufacture the chemicals (the designer of the Tennessee electric chair was a Holocaust denier called Fred Leuchter), judges sentence, pro-life governors refuse appeals, and people press the switch. When the event is over, the hangman goes home to his bed. So how are things done in Texas? When defendants cannot afford lawyers, judges appoint their cronies. The quality of

this defense is not thought to be very high: In one celebrated case, a court-appointed lawyer fell asleep during his client's trial. But the pro-life governor vetoed a bill that would have created a new public defender's office and spoke against, thus dooming, a bill that would have banned the execution of the mentally retarded. (Twelve states with capital punishment have already adopted this prohibition; Illinois is considering it.) One of Texas's own federal district judges, Sam Sparks, found that "the Texas clemency procedure is extremely poor and certainly minimal."

THE TEXAS BOARD OF PARDONS AND Paroles decides each case. The pro-life governor's first general counsel, Al Gonzales, reckons that some cases before the board took 15 minutes to decide, and most took about half an hour, a process doubtless speeded up by the fact that the board does not actually meet but—as with the Academy Awards—telephones or faxes in its "votes." "It's difficult to say those kinds of things were routine, but we had become quite efficient," Gonzales cheerily told *The New York Times*. The pro-life governor has the right to order a stay of 30 days, but he doesn't much like to do this, and he famously refused to in the case of Karla Faye Tucker, a killer who had married a chaplain, committed her life to Christ, and asked to be spared so that she could minister to sinners in prison. The pro-life governor said at the time, "I have concluded judgments about the heart and soul of an individual on death row are best left to a higher authority." So it is permissible to judge simple matters like life and death, but those ticklish matters of heart and soul are best left to God. The pro-life governor wrote that the Tucker case, the fifty-ninth he had handled, "put a face" on the death penalty for him. This was after 58 faceless people had already been dispatched.

IS THIS REMOTELY CHRISTIAN? THE strongest theme of Jesus's ministry was that we should not piously announce our great devotions, like the Pharisees he saw as hypocritical and rule-sodden, but quietly devote ourselves to repentance—and forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness. Jesus was zealous about this. He is always requesting from us a love and forgiveness that is superhuman, that goes beyond anything ever known before. It is a revolutionary love, and it runs throughout the Gospels. When, in chapter nine of Matthew, the Pharisees asked Jesus why he spent time with sinners, he replied that only those who are ill need a physician. "Go then and learn what this meaneth," Jesus continued, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the just [meaning the self-righteous] but sinners."

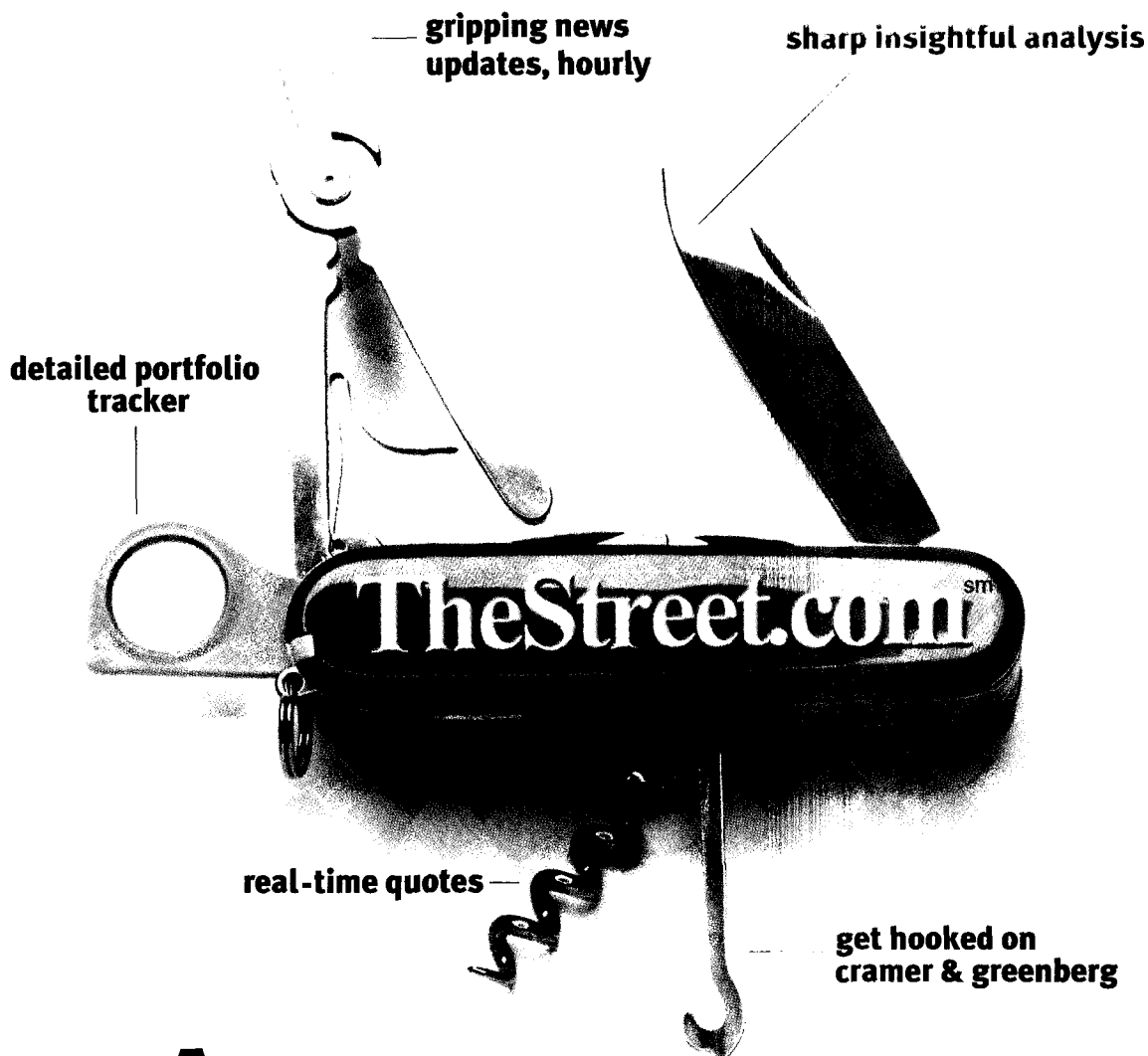
THE PRO-LIFE GOVERNOR STEPPED into hot water when, in the words of Matthew, he suggested that the only route to God the Father is through his son, Jesus Christ. Bush may know the Book of Matthew, then, and know that, in the Gospels of both Matthew and Luke, Jesus tells the parable of the lost sheep, in which he asks his listeners who would not, if he had 100 sheep and one went astray, leave the 99 in safety and seek the stray. Likewise, "there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon 99 just who need not penance." Elsewhere, Peter once asked Jesus how often he should forgive his brother if he sinned against him. Seven times? No, said Jesus, "seventy times seven times." All sinners shall be forgiven, Jesus says in Mark 3:28, except he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit. And we shall be judged by our forgiveness, Jesus promised. Those who are taken into paradise will be those who minister to their fellow humans in sickness, poverty, and prison: "Naked, and you covered me, sick and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me" (Matthew 25:18).

NO THEME IN THE NEW TESTAMENT IS more pronounced than the injunction that those who have themselves been forgiven of their sins should forgive others. We hear much about how Bush has been "redeemed." At the very minimum, one can say it was Bush's Christian duty to pardon Karla Faye Tucker. It is true that one of the two robbers crucified along with Jesus said, according to Luke, "We receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man [Christ] hath done no evil." And it is true that personal forgiveness of sins is somewhat different from the due process of the state. But Christ also enjoined believers, "Be ye therefore perfect, as my Father in heaven." And the pro-life governor's hard-heartedness on this issue is far from perfect. Is it possible to read the Gospels and not conclude that the true Christian challenge is not to plume oneself up over the spotless rectitude of one's "position" on abortion but quietly to go and forgive others?

ON JANUARY 21 OF THIS YEAR LARRY Robison was executed in Texas. His crimes were horrific; but he had been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia at the age of 21 and never treated, because he lacked medical insurance. The execution was overseen by Lieutenant Governor Rick Perry, the acting executive. The pro-life governor, for whom a stay of execution required perhaps a phone call from a hotel suite, was on the campaign trail.

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